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In These Times

INDEPENDENT NEWS & VIEWS

April 1, 2002

Fueling the Flames



Labor and greens
must join forces to stop
Bush's assault on the planet

David Moberg reports

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Editorial

Disinformation Follies

Back in the '80s, the Reagan administration established an elaborate and illegal domestic propaganda apparatus known as the Office of Public Diplomacy for Latin America and the Caribbean. Its covert mission: Sell Congress, the media and the American people on the administration's war against leftists in Central America. The stated objective: Convince Americans that the Contras are "fighters for freedom in the American tradition" and that the "FSLN [Sandinistas] are evil."

When the Iran-Contra scandal broke, the Office of Public Diplomacy was dismantled and its unit of Psychological Operations (Psyops) agents sent home to their U.S. Army base at Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

Three administrations—and several enemies—later, Army Psyops agents were again deployed in Washington, again fighting "evil," but this time from the Pentagon's new Office of Strategic Influence (OSI). The covert mission: Target foreign media organizations in the Middle East, Asia and Western Europe with disinformation campaigns. The objective: Convince foreign leaders and citizens to support U.S. policy.

The difference this time around is that conscientious Pentagon officials leaked OSI's plans to the *New York Times*. A senior Pentagon official put it this way, "Everybody understands using information operations to go after non-friendlies. When people get uncomfortable is when people use the same tools and tactics on friendlies."

The resulting media furor led Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld to close the program on February 26. "The office is done," he told reporters. "What do you want, blood?"

How about some honest information?

A good place to start would be the administration's fiscal year 2003 defense budget. Bush says increased spending is necessary because the nation is at war. Rumsfeld has explained that he inherited a military that was "overused and underfunded."

On February 12, Lawrence Korb (who wrote our April 2, 2001 cover story, "Pentagon Spending Spree") testified before the House Budget Committee. The former assistant secretary of defense in the Reagan administration, who now works

with Business Leaders for Sensible Priorities, pointed out that should the Bush budget be approved:

- Defense spending will have risen by \$88.2 billion, or 30 percent, since fiscal year 2001.

- The United States alone will consume about 40 percent of the world's total military expenditures.

- The United States will spend more on defense than the next 15 countries in the world combined.

Korb refuted Bush's justifications for the increase. "We've already budgeted for the military's role in the war against terrorism," he said. The Defense Department received a \$20 billion supplement, about what the administration calculates the war will cost.

As for the allegedly sorry state of U.S. preparedness, Korb noted the military's "magnificent" performance in Afghanistan and that "Bill Clinton left Donald Rumsfeld with a defense budget that in real terms was \$25 billion higher than the one President Ford bequeathed to him in his first term as secretary of defense in 1975."

Indeed, Korb testified, the administration's massive military budget increase can only be explained as a failure of Bush to

"The office is done," Donald Rumsfeld told reporters. "What do you want, blood?"

carry out his campaign promise to transform the military. Rumsfeld "simply layered his new programs on top of the Clinton programs he inherited," unwilling to exert the political will needed to cut redundant, unnecessary and, in some cases, unworkable weapons systems, said Korb. (In fact, fewer U.S. soldiers have died in Afghanistan than were killed in Osprey aircraft crashes since Dick Cheney tried to cancel the program as defense secretary in 1989.)

The mainstream media rightly condemned—and to great effect—the administration's plans to deploy Psyops agents worldwide in a covert operation to subvert media organizations. Perhaps editors and journalists could now take off their red, white and blue blinders, and focus some of that righteous indignation at Bush's overt operation to enrich Pentagon defense contractors at the expense of programs that serve human needs. —Joel Bleifuss

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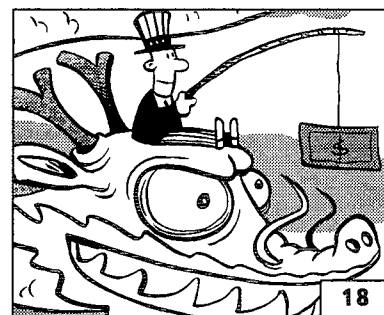
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Papal Discourse

It never ceases to amaze me how liberal "Catholics" are able to demonize and ridicule orthodoxy within the church while glorifying dissenters whose sole purpose seems to be the destruction of same. Carl Bromley's "Autumn of the Patriarch" (March 4) is not only scathingly one-sided, it falls victim to the obvious hypocrisy in modern progressive journalism: Where's the opposing viewpoint? Even more conservative publications like the *National Catholic Review* seek out and publish opposing viewpoints within the text of articles.

Bromley respectfully references John Cornwell and Garry Wills (both having been *de facto* excommunicated by their heretical beliefs on premarital sex—hetero or homo—contraception, abortion and papal authority) as being "propelled by a deep Catholic faith" while referring to the church of Pope John Paul II as having a "cold, metallic embrace."

Let me state this as succinctly as possible so none of your readers will get the wrong idea: He's dead wrong. The Holy Father is the most dynamic and charismatic leader the church has had in centuries (no hyperbole) and his impact will be felt for generations. His embrace of Jesus Christ and the principles he taught is an affront to the secular humanist Catholics of the world who want to be told by nobody how to live their life.

The church, contrary to Bromley's view, is experiencing a renewal with respect to both the laity and the clergy. Ordinations, for example, are up 75 percent in John Paul II's pontificate, compared to those before he was elected. World Youth Day typically draws between 500,000 and 1 million people every two years, most of whom travel many thousands of miles just to be in the presence of the man who is the successor to Saint Peter.

Are there problems within the church? Absolutely. We've faced them for 2,000 years and still have managed to survive and thrive. We will continue despite the Garry Wills, the John Cornwells, the Carl Bromleys and the *In These Times* of the world.

Christopher G. Tasy
Sanger, California

Carl Bromley writes up a storm about the status of the Catholic Church. He gives a good summary of the anti-papacy critics. Disapproving of what he sees as the reactionary doctrines of the church (abortion, birth control, etc.) and especially of the present pope, the papacy is seen as the root of all evil.

Who is the perfect example of all that is bad? Why, the "Nazi collaborator" Pope Pius XII! But to achieve some sort of semi-objective status, he declares not all the popes were bad, so Pope John XXIII is pronounced good.

Bromley accepts the word of Daniel Goldhagen (who skewers the Church left and right) that John XXIII, when he was papal legate to Turkey, saved Jews from the Nazis. But of course, Pius XII did not: The "socialist, anarchist, trade unionist" Italian peasants saved 80 percent of the Jews in Italy, "despite Pius XII." So then we are to believe that Pius had nothing to do with saving Jews in his native country, and had nothing to do with what John did, even though John was Pius' personal representative! This isn't scholarship. This is some kind of ideological game.

Louis J. Giovino
Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights
New York

Carl Bromley replies: My intention was to be neither objective nor semi-objective. I write from a broadly left-wing, socialist perspective. I never try to pretend otherwise, just as Pope John II, to his credit I suppose, never disguises his own theological and ideological leanings. Tasy is confused about the role of "progressive journalism." Isn't it to provide a counter-balance and an alternative to the mainstream media?

While I don't claim to be objective, I do stick to the facts. Daniel Goldhagen's essay in *The New Republic* presents a remarkable and devastating synthesis of modern

scholarship that effectively destroys the Catholic Church's lamentable attempt to enter Pope Pius XII into the anti-Nazi pantheon. The mounting evidence demonstrates that the work of saving Jews in World War II, by Angelo Roncalli and other Catholics, was done despite Pius XII, who had always conflated Jewry with Bolshevism. And yes, I do think that Italy's "religious and rebellious traditions" (to quote Thomas Cahill) had far more to do with the saving of Italy's Jews than a fascist-fancying Pope. (We'll be hearing more of this with Costa-Gavras' new film about Pius XII. I'm sure I'll be crossing Giovino's picket line to see it).

Tasy accuses me of being scathingly one-sided, yet unlike John Paul II, I don't have the resources to excommunicate, harass and blacklist those who disagree with me. There's also nothing heretical about Cornwell and Wills writing on premarital sex ("hetero or homo"), contraception, abortion and papal authority. (I don't recall that Christ had views on these matters.)

Tasy claims that there's no hyperbole intended when he writes, "The Holy Father is the most dynamic and charismatic leader the church has had in centuries." No, it's not hyperbole. It's idolatry.

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Terry LaBan



False Witness

No evidence, but a Missouri inmate is facing execution

By Dave Lindorff

One of the arguments raised against the death penalty is that, when prosecutors succeed in executing a person convicted of murder, they lose any interest in finding out later that they might be wrong. Yet if they are wrong, the actual killer remains at large.

That may be exactly what is about to happen in the case of Joseph Amrine, a man who is facing execution on Missouri's Death Row for killing a fellow prison inmate 17 years ago, though none of the evidence used to convict him in the original case remains.

Amrine is in Potosi Correctional Center awaiting a decision on an appeal for clemency from Missouri state Gov. Bob Holden. Holden, a conservative Democrat, has been signing death warrants and watching the state execute prisoners during his term at a pace of about one execution per month, making him one of the more ardent executioners in the nation. After the Supreme Court declined to review his case last year, a pardon from Holden is Amrine's last hope to avoid the gallows.

Amrine, jailed on a check-kiting conviction in early 1985, says he was just playing cards in the prison's recreation room when another inmate, Gary Barber, was stabbed to death in October 1985. His story is supported by the testimony of several other witnesses. A prison guard saw another man, Terry Russell, run from the scene of the crime, chased by Barber, who died shortly after the incident. Russell was then identified by the guard and taken into custody. But under interrogation, Russell accused Amrine of the murder. And though Russell had a clear motive for the crime—he and Barber had just been released from segregated detention for fighting a week earlier—Amrine was charged with the murder based upon the testimony of Russell and two other inmates.

Amrine's 1986 trial was notable for the poor defense offered by Julian Ossman, a Cole County public defender who has six clients currently sitting on Missouri's

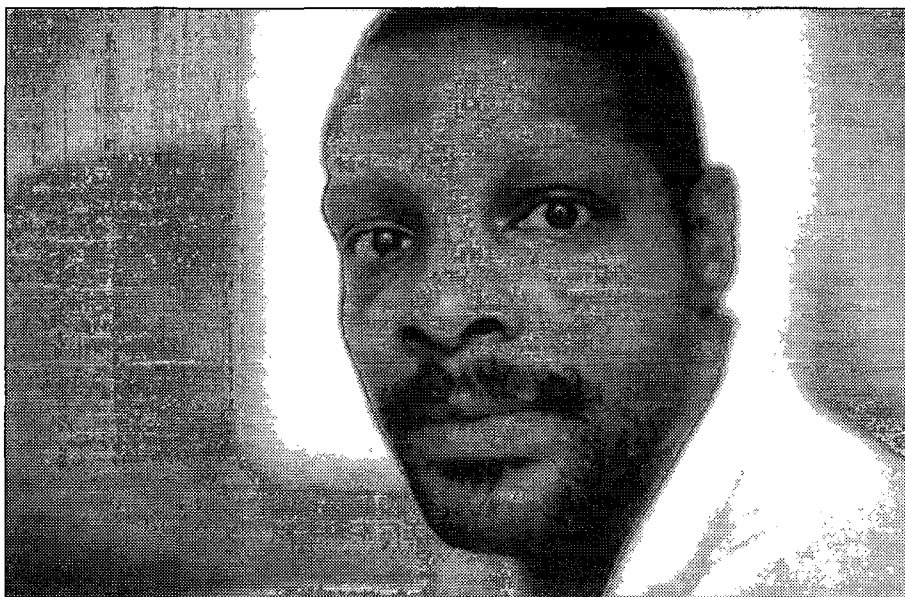
Death Row. Two of Ossman's death penalty cases, both of which he lost, have been overturned by federal courts for ineffective counsel. (Efforts to reach Ossman by phone were unsuccessful.)

Amrine's attorney and even jurors who sat through the case say he failed to call the jury's attention to conflicts between the stories of the three prosecution witnesses. One witness, who was ready to testify at the trial that he had seen Russell slay Barber, stood shackled in the hall waiting to be called by Ossman. For unknown reasons, he was never brought into court. Although other inmate witnesses testified that Amrine had been with them at the

still a witness standing by his original accusation, the judge ruled, Amrine's claim of innocence had to be denied.

The case might have ended there, but later Poe, too, recanted his testimony. At that point, the same federal judge rejected the recantations of all three, saying that as prison inmates they were not credible. Yet as Amrine's lead attorney Sean O'Brien notes in his pardon petition to the governor, "Those factors apply with equal or greater force to the testimony they gave against Amrine at his trial."

Ordinarily, courts have held that the testimony of prison snitches should be taken with a high degree of skepticism.



Missouri Death Row inmate Joseph Amrine: Where's the evidence?

card table the whole time, the jury believed the testimony of the three inmates who accused him, and Amrine was convicted and sentenced to death.

Over the past 17 years, the three prosecution eyewitnesses have recanted their testimony, saying they were pressured to lie and promised protection by prison authorities. But none of those retractions have been enough to grant Amrine a new trial.

One witness against Amrine, Randall Ferguson, says he began writing letters to authorities trying to recant his testimony immediately after the trial. In 1995, Russell filed an affidavit claiming he lied in accusing Amrine. On appeal, however, federal Judge Fernando Gaitan rejected the first two recantations, noting that the third witness against Amrine, Jerry Poe, had not recanted his testimony. Because there was

In this case, though the only evidence linking Amrine to the prison slaying was the testimony of three snitches, that testimony at trial is being taken so seriously by the courts that it outweighs their recantation of that testimony—surely a peculiar irony. And yet the end result is that, failing a commutation or pardon by the governor, Amrine is going to die as a result of testimony that no longer exists.

At least three of the jurors who sat on that case, including the jury foreman, have stated publicly that they believe Amrine was falsely convicted and that he should be released from prison or granted a new trial. "At a minimum he deserves a new trial," says Larry Hildebrand, a 50-year-old computer programmer and analyst. "All the witnesses are saying something different now, and if they'd

been saying what they're saying now, I never would have voted to convict him."

Richard Callahan, the current head of the Cole County prosecutor's office that originally prosecuted Amrine, says his policy is not to prosecute capital cases at all in which the only witnesses are jailhouse snitches. He is "deeply troubled" that all of Amrine's accusers have since recanted.

The state Attorney General's Office, which has consistently fought Amrine's appeals, has not taken a position on his clemency position, saying it is up to the governor to decide what to do. Spokesman Scott Holste says, "We would only comment on his claim if the governor asked for our opinion."

There is a movement developing in support of Amrine among students at local colleges, and the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* has editorialized against his execution.

Within a year of his conviction, Amrine's lawyer O'Brien reports, Russell had killed another man. "If we hadn't convicted Amrine," Hildebrand suggests, "maybe they'd have gone back and charged Russell with the crime, and he wouldn't have been able to kill again." ■

Affirmative Action

Britain passes measures to elect more women

By Paul Rodgers

LONDON—Confronted by the first drop in the number of women elected to the House of Commons in 20 years, British lawmakers passed a bill in January to reinstate a previously banned election procedure that favors female candidates for seats in Parliament.

The bill would allow Britain's political parties to mandate women-only so-called shortlists—the lists of candidates for the House of Commons put forth to party members in the British equivalent of primary elections. A brief experiment with all-women shortlists helped elect a record 120 women to the Commons in 1997, up from 60 five years earlier. But by then the practice had already been ruled illegal.

The bill, which received the support of all political parties and moved rapidly through Parliament, revises British sex-discrimination laws to allow parties to impose forms of "positive discrimination" that are illegal if practiced by private companies. It passed its final vote in Parliament on January 28 and now awaits only the assent of the queen. Under a sunset clause in the bill, its provisions would lapse in 2015, probably after three elections.

A law professor and disappointed office-seeker, Peter Jepson, successfully challenged the women-only policy in an employment tribunal in Leeds in the mid-'90s. "When asked, 'Why not do more to reduce inequality in representation of women and men in Parliament?' we have been able to hide behind the Jepson case, which has cast a legal shadow over positive measures," says MP Stephen Byers. "But with this measure on the statute book, there would be no hiding place for political parties."

MP Candy Atherton is the first person ever selected off an all-woman shortlist and one of the most vocal advocates of reinstating the practice. "I wouldn't even have been called in for an interview if men had been in the race," she says. "A couple of local men just assumed they were going to get the nomination."

But Jepson is prepared to take his party to court again, this time under E.U. law. "I'm not at odds with the Labor Party over the inadequate representation of women in Parliament," he says. "But there is nothing positive about discrimination."

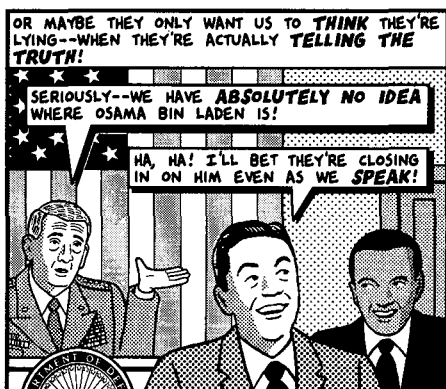
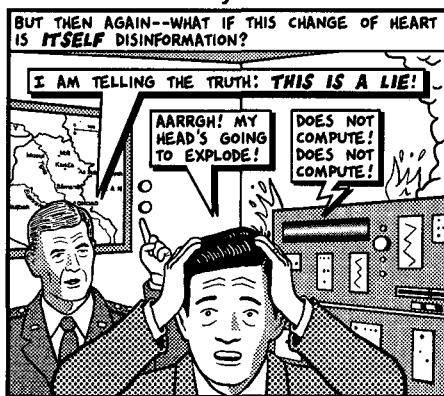
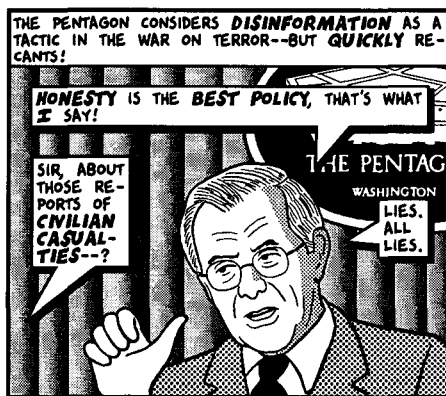
His preferred solution is "twinning," in which two constituencies combine to select a pair of candidates, one male, one female. In 1999, twinning led to women winning 37 percent of the seats in the Scottish Parliament and 41 percent of those in the Welsh Assembly.

While offering no real opposition to the bill permitting women-only shortlists, leaders of the opposition Conservative Party indicated they would not implement the policy. Instead, they plan to create training programs for women considering public office and to use polling data to try to persuade local officials to back promising women candidates.

MP Anne Widdecombe, a defeated candidate for the leadership of the

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



Conservative Party who remains influential, says that a policy of women-only shortlists would deny men's human rights and would be patronizing and demeaning to women. "It would create two groups of women MPs," she says, "one who could look everyone from the prime minister down in the eye, and the other that got there because of special favors. I wouldn't find that helpful. I'd find it humiliating."

Widdecombe is confident the gender balance in Parliament will shift when the generation of women who grew up in the '80s—when 10 Downing Street seemed the exclusive property of Margaret Thatcher—enter their forties and fifties and start to move into politics.

But Byers says the Labor Party supports a more interventionist approach to correct the longstanding imbalance of power. "Relying on improvements to be made without direct intervention has been tried before and has failed," he says. "It was that view that meant that in 1945 there were 24 women members of the House of Commons, and almost 40 years later in 1983, four years after the first female prime minister was elected, there were 23—hardly an encouraging statistic that supports the argument for 'biding one's time.'"



REUTERS / PAUL BATES

British MP Anne Widdecombe, an opponent of quotas for women.

Britain ranks 40th among world parliaments for the percentage of women sitting in its lower house. Eighteen percent of its members are women. (The U.S. House of Representatives ranks 52nd with 14 percent, the global average.) At the top of the list of 179 coun-

tries are Sweden, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, Iceland and Germany. In several Latin American countries, notably Argentina, parties are required by law to meet a quota of women candidates. The 74th amendment to India's Constitution in 1993

A New Generation

College freshmen are more liberal now than at any time since the Vietnam War, a new study by researchers at UCLA reports. In a nationwide study of 281,064 incoming freshmen at 421 colleges and universities, 29.9 percent of students identified themselves as liberal or "far left," the highest number since 1975.

Conducted continuously since 1966, the American Freshman Survey is the nation's oldest and most comprehensive measure of student attitudes and beliefs. 1971, during the height of the Vietnam War, had the highest percentage of liberal respondents, at 40.9 percent. "Among the more striking findings of this year's poll was a reversal in a long slide toward political apathy on college campuses," Linda Sax, a professor of education at UCLA and director of this year's study, told the *Los Angeles Times*. Almost half of all respondents—47.5 percent—reported having participated in a political demonstration during the past year.

Since it is administered when students begin college, the study primarily reflects high school rather than college experiences and, researchers conclude, reflects a general trend toward more liberal attitudes among young people. A record number of students (57.9 percent) said they believed gay couples should have the right to marry, 32.2 percent said the death penalty should be abolished, and more than a third thought marijuana should be legalized.

Seventy percent had also socialized with someone of another ethnic or cultural group during the past year, and more than 80 percent reported having volunteered.

All War, All the Time

If students are getting more liberal, the media sure aren't. A Project for Excellence in Journalism study of the media since September 11, released in January, found that 62 percent of news coverage of the war in Afghanistan has overwhelmingly or predominantly favored U.S. policy. Only 10 percent of 2,496 stories from television news, talk shows and newspaper coverage presented negative or dissenting views.

Seventy-three percent of Americans, according to a poll conducted in November by the Pew Charitable Trusts, which funded the study, say it is better for the press to present differing viewpoints than to be favorable toward U.S. policy in reporting the news. Immediately after 9/11, the study noted, the news media scored their highest approval ratings in 15 years, with 59 percent of those polled saying the press was doing an "excellent" job in covering the crisis. But there was a connection between approval ratings and the amount of straightforward, factual information audiences were receiving: As of mid-November, those numbers had gone down to 30 percent.

—Kristie Reilly

reserved a third of the seats in village councils for women. In France, a law requiring that women's names fill half the slots on slates for municipal office resulted in women winning nearly 48 percent of the seats in city governments last summer.

Full equality may be on hold in Britain. Labor's national executive committee announced on January 30 that it would drop its goal of having 50-50 representation after the next election, aiming for 35 percent instead. "We still have an aspiration of 50 percent of women MPs, but you have to be realistic about these things," a party spokesman says. "We would have to have something like 140 MPs retire or die to get 50 percent at the next election." ■

Paul Rodgers has written for *The Economist*, *New Scientist* and *The Independent*. A version of this article originally appeared on www.womensenews.org.

Seeds of Destruction

Genetic contamination raises stakes on GMOs

By Karen Charman

Last fall, a University of California, Berkeley researcher announced the discovery of genetically engineered corn in the remote highlands of Oaxaca, Mexico. The corn was popping up along roadsides, out of cracks in the sidewalks and seemingly anywhere else it could find soil, in scores of mountain settlements.

The discovery sent alarms through the scientific community: Mexico banned the use of such corn in 1998. Scientists say it provides yet more evidence that genetically modified organisms (GMOs) cannot

be controlled once they are released into the environment.

The discovery is especially significant because the contamination occurred in the ancestral homeland of corn. Crop homelands must be preserved because they contain important genetic information scientists return to for developing blight-resistant crop strains when catastrophic pests or diseases strike. Oaxacans speculate the transgenic varieties sprouted after falling off government trucks that brought subsidized bioengineered corn as food aid to local communities. "Genes flowing from genetically modified crops can threaten the diversity of natural crops by crowding out native plants," Ignacio Chapela, the Berkeley scientist who discovered the contamination (published in *Nature* in September), said in a statement.

GM contamination like that in Mexico is one reason many countries have strongly resisted the introduction of

Any Volunteers? 4.3

The University of Tennessee's *Daily Beacon* reports that the Kappa Alpha fraternity on campus is in danger of losing its charter and being thrown out of its house. But it wasn't the gambling and holding cock fights in the house basement, or even the weekly stripper they hired.

What sunk them was the frat's boxing tournament featuring Knoxville winos. The frat boys would recruit homeless men, "liquor them up" give them boxing gloves, "and let them go to town." Chapter President Patrick Diener added that these events were tolerated in the past, but Kappa Alpha's new national officers forbade them.

Hidden Meanings 6.6

In television and radio ads currently running in five Midwestern states, President Bush appears to say: "There's something more important than politics, and that's to do our jobs." This line is delivered after the Democratic senator of each state is accused of being "partisan" in our time of national emergency.

The Bush administration, great believers in the hidden messages embedded in media emissions, may have been secretly communicating with its own terrorist operative. Ann

Coulter, the irrepressible cavewoman of pundit TV, shortly thereafter exhorted the faithful at a conservative political convention in Northern Virginia:

"We need to execute people like John Walker in order to physically intimidate liberals, by making them realize that they can be killed, too. Otherwise they will turn out to be outright traitors."

Power from on High 5.6

What would Jesus deregulate? The electric utilities, possibly, but for a fee. Or so suggested Ralph Reed, erstwhile boy hero of Christian Coalition politicking, in a memo to the Enron Corporation leaked to the *Washington Post*.

Reed and his firm, Century Strategies, had worked for Enron in 1997 lobbying for deregulation legislation in Pennsylvania. In October 2000,

Reed wrote to Enron proposing a \$380,000 campaign that would enlist "faith-based activists," conservative talk-show hosts, and even mainstream op-ed pages to beat the drum for deregulation.

"In public policy, it matters less who has the best arguments and more who gets heard—and by whom," Reed wrote in the memo.

"Elected officials and regulators will be predisposed to favor greater market-oriented solutions if they hear from business, civic and religious leaders in their communities."

Amen, brother. Here's how much it'll cost you:

- Twenty "facilitating letters," signed by a third party, to each of 17 members of the congressional commerce committees that handle deregulation: \$170,000
- Guests booked on radio talk shows: \$30,000
- Telemarketing campaign that patches pissed-off Christians through to congressional reps: \$79,500.
- Op-eds signed by "opinion leaders" in major newspapers, which will then be "blast-faxed" to elected officials: \$25,000.



APPALL-O-METER

By Dave Mulcahey



TERRY LABAN

GMOs, especially in the genetically diverse developing world. In January 2000, more than 130 developing nations led the fight for an international treaty, the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, that would permit a country to refuse transgenic imports if it believes the shipment would endanger its population.

The United States has long argued there is no reason for such a protocol at all, and successfully weakened the accord, which is currently being ratified by signatories, with help from a handful of other grain-trading nations. According to Ben Lilliston of the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, the United States has not yet ratified the protocol, nor is it expected to do so anytime soon.

Last year, an estimated 130 million acres of biotech crops were grown by 5.5 million farmers in 13 countries. In the United States, which planted 88.2 million acres of bioengineered crops last year—68 percent of the global total—genetic pollution is already rampant. Virtually all Midwestern organic corn samples tested in 2000 showed some degree of transgenic contamination, says Fred Kirschenmann, executive director of the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture. "It's becoming clear that transgenic contamination can only escalate."

Conventional corn farmers who grow non-GM varieties are suffering as a result of the introduction of GM crops. International markets for U.S. corn have shriveled, if not evaporated, since a global consumer revolt against bioengineered foods began in Europe in 1998. Bill Cristison, president of the National Family Farm Coalition, says the market disruption due to biotech corn has slashed nonorganic corn prices about 30 cents a bushel, or roughly 15 percent. It is a drop growers can ill afford, since it costs them more to produce their crop than the market returns.

Aside from market trouble, farmers are being targeted by biotech companies—especially Monsanto—when bioengineered seeds show up on their land (see "Bad Seeds," June 25, 2001). Biotechnology companies hold patents on their seeds, and Monsanto is currently suing more than a dozen farmers across Canada and the Midwest for "patent infringement." Many more farmers are reported to be under active investigation. Considering that transgenic contamination is proving impossible to prevent, such



DANIEL AGUILAR / REUTERS

Lino Martinez, a corn farmer in La Trinidad, Oaxaca; GM corn was found in villages nearby.

legal action may eventually force farmers to buy bioengineered seed whether they—or their customers—want it or not.

Though transgenic contamination threatens the lucrative and growing international and domestic markets for organic produce, the U.S. government doesn't seem to care. Last November, the Food and Drug Administration warned organic food manufacturers not to label their products "GMO free," because organic manufacturers likely could not substantiate the claim—which the agency views as misleading, in any case, since it insists GM foods are safe.

But legislation opposing or regulating GM products is appearing around the country. Last year, Maryland banned genetically engineered fish in its waters, and Oregon has a similar measure in the works. New York and Vermont are considering GM crop moratoriums, and Massachusetts, North Carolina and Hawaii are considering laws that regulate growing and marketing certain GM crops. Grassroots farming organizations are also pushing legislation to protect them against lost markets, transgenic contamination, and liability resulting from GMOs.

But of the 11 states that have introduced labeling laws, only Maine's—which is voluntary—has passed. On the other hand, according to the Pew Initiative on Food and Biotechnology, as of October 2001, two-thirds of the state laws related to biotechnology enacted

last year were promoted by biotechnology companies and targeted activists vandalizing GM crops or animals.

Meanwhile, the United States has embraced biotechnology as one of the pillars of economic growth. The federal government continues to operate as the biotech industry's principal cheerleader and bully, and calls for moratoriums on future GMO releases from scientists and the public are ignored or vigorously fought. Despite the demands of foreign governments and consumers in the United States and abroad to label bioengineered food, the feds continue to refuse—working hard to prevent anything that might hinder the technology's acceptance.

The Bush administration has inserted a provision into "fast track" trade legislation that would deem labeling GM food by other countries an unfair trade barrier and make violators liable for costly trade sanctions. The administration is also preparing to challenge the European Union's requirement for labeling transgenic food at the World Trade Organization.

At the beginning of February, activists from more than 50 countries announced support for a treaty to establish the earth's gene pool as a global commons, called the "Initiative to Share the Genetic Commons." They are also beginning an active campaign to challenge government and corporate claims on patents on life in every country. More than 300 organizations have signed on to the effort. ■

When HMOs Attack

HMOs aim to stop even modest reform in its tracks

By Thomas D. Elias

California's HMO reform laws, in force since mid-2000, make up the toughest patients' bill of rights in the nation. They allow bigger fines and send more types of challenged HMO decisions to independent review boards than in any of the other 40 states with such panels.

But those reforms are now facing significant challenges. In recent months, California HMOs have filed a string of lawsuits in an effort to escape the regulations they failed to defeat in the state legislature in 1999.

In December, the HMO California Blue Shield filed the first suit challenging California's reforms. Bridling under the system of almost unlimited review of patient care decisions, Blue Shield is trying to sharply limit the kinds of cases California's new Department of Managed Health Care can ask the independent boards to review.

Many HMOs object even more strongly to another part of California's laws, which have allowed regulators to levy the nation's biggest HMO fines.

Kaiser Permanente, California's largest HMO, sued in federal court last fall after getting hit with a \$1.1 million penalty for inadequate care in cases that led to the deaths of three plan members between 1996 and 2000.

All died after seeking care in Kaiser hospitals that even the HMO admits are overcrowded. Kaiser argued that since the patients were covered by federal Medicare insurance, the state didn't have the right to oversee their cases, asking a federal judge to cite Daniel Zingale, director of the new oversight department, for contempt of court for levying the fine. On December 10, Judge Ronald Lew declined to issue a contempt citation. Kaiser has promised to appeal and has filed a separate suit to overturn the fine.

These efforts are part of a steady campaign by HMOs to shake off the state's tough new regulations. The California Medical Association, a branch of the American Medical Association, has also sued to prevent Zingale's department from releasing information on the financial standing of medical groups, winning a temporary restraining order from state courts. Zingale argues that the public is entitled to know how much of the health-care dollar goes to actual care and how much to administrative costs and corporate profits.

It was predictable that lawsuits would be a prime HMO tactic. This industry, which lobbies in both Congress and state legislatures against allowing patients any right to sue them, hesitates little in filing legal actions of its own. HMOs have also appealed hundreds of orders from the new California department and simply refused to comply with others.

"This is a new department, and we think they've overstepped their bounds in some of their enforcement actions," California Blue Shield lawyer Steven Madison told a reporter after filing the HMO's bid to cut regulators' ability to refer patient disputes to independent review boards. (Madison also represents Kaiser.) The boards have the power to compel HMOs to provide services or medications they have previously denied patients. In their first year of operation in California, the boards handled 651 patient appeals and upheld HMO decisions in 58 percent of cases.

Of any of these steps, Kaiser's demand that director Zingale be cited for con-

Opposition on the Rise in Israel

The following petition was published in the Israeli press on January 25 and is part of a growing resistance to Israeli policies in the Occupied Territories. "We've reached the state where we shoot out of fear," an Israeli soldier recently told the Los Angeles Times. "We use these bullets as a kind of shield, a wall, because we don't have a wall or concrete to protect us."

As in These Times went to press, 300 Israeli reservists, soldiers and officers had signed the petition. The action has not gone without reprisal: 600 reservists were jailed by the Israeli military in late January in a crackdown on war resisters, and three of the petition's signers have been sentenced to 28 days in prison.

- We, reserve combat officers and soldiers of the Israel Defense Forces, who were raised upon the principles of Zionism, sacrifice and giving to the people of Israel and to the State of Israel, who have always served in the front lines, and who were the first to carry out any mission, light or heavy, in order to protect the State of Israel and strengthen it;
- We, combat officers and soldiers who have served the State of Israel for long weeks every year, in spite of the dear cost to our personal lives, have been on reserve duty all over the Occupied Territories, and were issued commands and

directives that had nothing to do with the security of our country, and that had the sole purpose of perpetuating our control over the Palestinian people. We, whose eyes have seen the bloody toll this occupation exacts from both sides;

- We, who sensed how the commands issued to us in the Territories, destroy all the values we had absorbed while growing up in this country;
- We, who understand now that the price of occupation is the loss of [the Israeli Defense Force's] human character and the corruption of the entire Israeli society;
- We, who know that the Territories are not Israel, and that all settlements are bound to be evacuated in the end;
- We hereby declare that we shall not continue to fight this War of the Settlements.
- We shall not continue to fight beyond the 1967 borders in order to dominate, expel, starve and humiliate an entire people.
- We hereby declare that we shall continue serving in the Israel Defense Forces in any mission that serves Israel's defense.
- The missions of occupation and oppression do not serve this purpose—and we shall take no part in them.

tempt is the most threatening to regulators and patients seeking redress. Judge Lew's refusal left intact the powers of the new HMO regulators, allowing them to consider the experiences of their state's 4.1 million Medicare patients in evaluating HMO services—Medicare patients account for 23 percent of HMO members in California. But Kaiser's pending appeal leaves the future of HMO regulation very much in doubt.

Kaiser's penalty was the largest of 48 assessed by the new agency in its first year. The company didn't even bother to deny the charges that led to the big fine, claiming instead that "in its zeal to be perceived as a patient and consumer advocate the department is overstepping."

"This case is becoming a battle over whether Kaiser has a license that requires it to provide timely care to patients or whether it has a license to kill," Jamie Court, director of the Foundation for Taxpayer and Consumer Rights, responds. "The HMO is seeking to put itself above the law in every jurisdiction where the public challenges it."

A challenge to the somewhat narrower authority of review boards in Illinois, brought by the Chicago-based Rush Prudential HMO, presents an even greater danger to HMO regulation. The case is now before the Supreme Court: If the Court does not uphold the power of Illinois' review board, California's board will be rendered powerless. "The Illinois case has the potential to gut our independent review process, just as much as the California suits," Zingale says. "Take that process away, and you've all but eliminated the California patients' bill of rights."

A decision ending independent reviews in Illinois would raise questions about the legality of any reviews of HMO decisions, all but wiping out any chance of significant federal reform, says Jamie Court. A decision is expected in July. "These businesses are trying to evade regulation as much as they can," Court says. "They say they're nothing but fiscal and administrative agencies with no responsibility for medical care, [but] they're making decisions about what care patients are allowed." ■

Thomas Elias is a political columnist for 62 California newspapers. His latest book is The Burzynski Breakthrough, now available in an updated second edition.

Bad Math

Pennsylvania debates are calculated to exclude Greens

By Jody Kolodzey

HARRISBURG, PENNSYLVANIA—When the Pennsylvania Newspaper Association decided to host a gubernatorial debate on January 29 here in conjunction with its 2002 Government Affairs Conference, it limited participation to candidates from "political parties that represent over 35 percent of registered voters in the Commonwealth."

The stipulation effectively eliminated third-party candidates: 35 times three equals 105, and there is no such thing as 105 percent in this context. At best, the PNA's faulty calculation was yet another example of the media's widely noted declining math skills. At worst, however, it represented an exclusionary agenda on the part of the industry group.

The PNA invited two Democrats and two Republicans—state Auditor General Robert P. Casey Jr. and former Philadelphia Mayor Edward G. Rendell, and state Attorney General D. Michael Fisher and state Treasurer Barbara Hafer, respectively. Michael Morrill, the Green Party candidate for governor and executive director of the Pennsylvania Citizens Action Network, was not acknowledged.

After the Morrill for Governor campaign complained and supporters sent letters to local newspapers, the PNA modified its explanation—but its quantifications and qualifications still did not compute.

In a memo distributed on January 16, PNA's Kara Dolphin Beem stated that time constraints were a major reason for Morrill's exclusion. By that date, however, Hafer had withdrawn from the race, so there were only three scheduled debaters for four original slots. Beem's statement also asserted that "under Pennsylvania election law, the Greens ... are a political body, not a

political party, and their candidates don't qualify to participate in the primary."

However, according to the Pennsylvania secretary of state, the Greens achieved official political party status on February 13, 2001 as a result of their showing in the November 2000 general election. Although it is true that the Greens are not eligible to appear on the Pennsylvania primary ballot, that is because they didn't garner at least 15 percent of the voters, not because they are not a bona fide political party. The Greens are currently the only recognized minority party in the state.

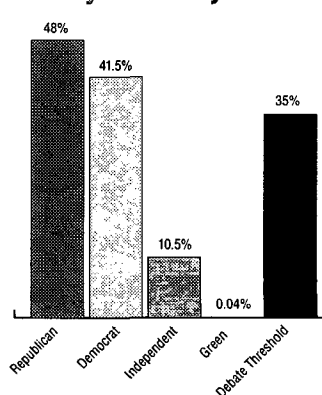
In Pennsylvania, which will elect a new governor in November, Democrats account for 48.03 percent of registered voters, Republicans 41.59 percent, and Greens 0.04 percent; another 10.33 percent are unaffiliated. In many states, however, just one party clears the 35 percent threshold, and in some states no party does. If the PNA criterion were applied, for example, in Colorado or Kansas, only Republicans would be permitted to debate; in Kentucky and California, only Democrats would qualify. In Alaska, Maine and New Jersey, neither major party has enough registered voters to satisfy the PNA.

As the debate date neared, Pennsylvania's daily press weighed in. The *Philadelphia Inquirer*, the state's largest newspaper, headlined its editorial with the imperative "Let Greens in debate" and declared that "The newspaper group erred in snubbing [the Green Party's] nominee."

The PNA partially relented and permitted Morrill to address its convention for 15 minutes on January 30, the day after the debate. "The only reason we got that was because of the public outcry," Morrill says. He accepted the slot reluctantly, he adds, because "we would not be widely perceived as reasonable to demand anything more."

Reached by phone after the debate, Beem said, "We did not include them because they are not on the primary ballot. ... We as a private organization have every right to limit our debate to whoever we want. We could have one party if we wanted." ■

Pennsylvania Party Affiliation



Marriage Proposal

By Ana Marie Cox

The most substantial criticism raised against the Bush administration's plan to divert \$300 million of the welfare budget to "promote marriage" among the poor is that no one really knows exactly how the money will be spent. Wade Horn, who oversees the welfare program at the Department of Health and Human Services, says this shouldn't matter: The money is for research into what will work, and "my central overriding concern is not marriage, it is the well-being of children."

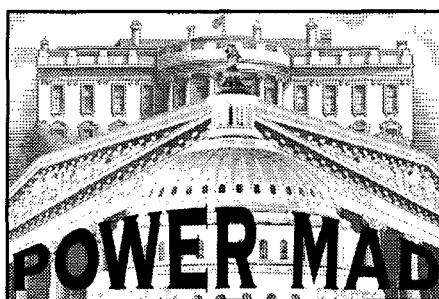
Oklahoma, one of the three states—along with Arizona and Michigan—that has already made matrimony a policy priority, has put much of its \$10 million marriage budget toward a "public awareness campaign" that includes pep rallies led by two evangelical Christian "marriage ambassadors." When pressed, Horn says he envisions state-funded marriage counseling and perhaps even "celebrity endorsements." Steven Covey, the *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* czar and a supporter of the proposal, suggests that families develop "mission statements" that would include staying together. It all sounds vaguely familiar; it's this decade's answer to the war on drugs. Only this time it's "Just Say Yes."

But the most vocal protest against the marriage promotion proposal hasn't been that it won't be successful. Rather, many have complained that the plan turns welfare into an experiment in social engineering. This argument misses the point: Welfare has always been an experiment in social engineering, a mostly well-intentioned one, but a subjective, imprecise and risky experiment nonetheless. Whether you believe it was originally designed to assist people in moving out of poverty or to create an incentive for choosing not to depends on your point of view.

And the use of welfare to promote a certain kind of behavior is not an invention of some shadowy family-values cabal. The significantly named Personal Responsibility and Workforce Opportunity Reconciliation Act of

1996—framed in Congress by the Gingrich leadership but endorsed by President Bill Clinton—opened the door for thinking of welfare as an experiment designed to comfort the sensibilities of those giving the money away rather than meet the needs of those receiving it.

By those limited standards, the experiment of welfare reform has worked. Sensibilities have been comforted. By the more traditional yardstick—getting people out of poverty—welfare reform



hasn't done much better than the flawed programs it replaced. A study by the nonpartisan Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, released in February, found that welfare reform in Connecticut increased the percentage of individuals who found work in the last six years by only 5 percent compared to a control group who continued to receive public aid under pre-1996 regulations. A national study by the Department of Health and Human Services found control groups in 11 different states got off welfare at almost the same rate as those participating in "workfare" programs, and 75 percent of them found jobs. Indeed, about the only significant difference in how workfare participants fared compared to those in traditional welfare programs seems to be that many left the workfare programs poorer than when they began.

None of this should come as a surprise. Programs that aren't really designed to help people usually don't. And this is the strongest blow to the marriage promotion plan: That it isn't about "the children"—or, for that mat-

ter, marriage—at all. If it were, Horn and his colleagues would not be pointing to the studies that demonstrate the benefits of growing up with two parents or the dangers of growing up with just one. Instead, they'd be looking at what keeps poor families apart in the first place. Surprise: It's being poor.

In fact, research implies that the only people whose minds will be changed by the public campaigns Horn envisions are his supporters, who currently believe that without them, poor people wouldn't want to get married. But they do. According to Marcia Carlson, a professor of social work and sociology at Columbia University, most welfare recipients, "even the unmarried poor ones, say, 'Marriage is good for children, I want to get married.'"

The big difference between those who do get married and those that don't is education and employment. "The more income you have," Carlson says, "the more likely you are to get married." Conversely, other studies have found that one of the biggest stresses on the poor couples who do get married is lack

They should be looking at what keeps poor families apart in the first place. Surprise: It's being poor.

of income. All of this suggests that the money being put into promoting marriage would be much better spent if they simply gave it away.

The 1996 act turned poverty into a failure of "personal responsibility." The Bush plan is simply a further ideological refinement, turning poverty into a moral failure as well as a personal financial one. For lawmakers today, the goal of welfare is no longer the elimination of poverty, but the elimination of feeling guilty about poverty. ■

Ana Marie Cox is the former editor of the dearly departed suck.com and has written for The Chronicle of Higher Education, Mother Jones, Wired and Spin. Her new column on Washington politics will appear regularly in In These Times.

Fueling the Flames

For both environmentalists and trade unionists, the Bush administration has been a disaster. A broad alliance between the two movements—beyond individual campaigns, such as opposition to “fast track” trading authority—has never seemed more essential. Yet as President Bush pushes drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) as part of a deficient energy plan and promotes an empty voluntary corporate response to global warming, environmentalists and unions are at odds.

The divisions clearly weaken green groups in their fight against anti-environmental policies. They also hurt the labor movement by alienating both important allies and large segments of the public (including strong majorities of union members) that oppose the administration’s anti-environmental positions. These “blue-green” tensions further undermine prospects for progressive political victories and for building a broad, popular movement that challenges the power of corporations.

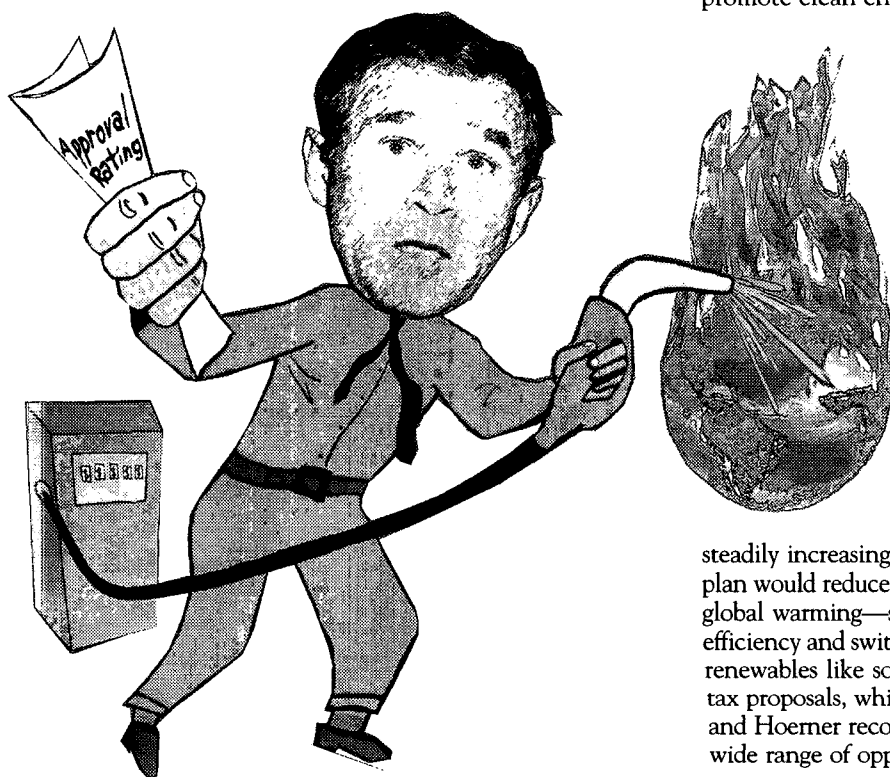
Six years ago, shortly after he took office as president of the AFL-CIO, John Sweeney hoped to head off these perils. He wanted to foster an alliance with greens and work out in advance a common labor position on thorny environmental issues. He asked Jane Perkins, formerly both a union official and head of Friends of the Earth, to work as the labor movement’s liaison with environmentalists. Perkins pulled together a “blue-green working group” of top staff from several unions and environmental leaders to discuss global warming.

Labor and greens must join forces to stop Bush’s assault on the planet

By David Moberg

But the Mineworkers and some building trades resisted even talking about possible common ground. Instead, unions opposed to environmental protection policies have struck out on their own, claiming that pro-environment policies—like limiting greenhouse gases or preserving wilderness—will cost jobs. The Teamsters, United Mine Workers and several building trades unions have openly endorsed Bush’s energy policy and ANWR drilling.

Despite the failure thus far to cement a national blue-green alliance, significant progress has been made in building relationships and developing local alliances that could form the foundation for continuing work. More progress is likely to come mainly from grassroots and local initiatives as well as the actions of individual pro-environment unions and their leaders, not from the AFL-CIO. The blue-green working group, however, did prove that it is possible for unions and environmentalists to devise a package of policies that can promote clean energy and protect jobs.



In February, leaders of the Service Employees, Steelworkers and UNITE (apparel and textile workers) joined with major environmental groups, such as the Sierra Club, Union of Concerned Scientists and Natural Resources Defense Council, to endorse a study by economists James Barrett, recently with the Economic Policy Institute, and J. Andrew Hoerner of the Center for a Sustainable Economy. “We in the labor movement are not going to make a choice between good jobs and a safe environment,” UNITE president Bruce Raynor said on the release of the report. “We’re for both.”

Barrett and Hoerner propose a modest, steadily increasing tax on the carbon content of energy. Such a plan would reduce use of the energy sources most responsible for global warming—such as coal and oil—by encouraging greater efficiency and switching to less harmful power sources, including renewables like solar and wind. But unlike many other carbon tax proposals, which rely solely on market price signals, Barrett and Hoerner recognize that engineers have already identified a wide range of opportunities to increase energy efficiency—and

Getting Out the Vote

NEW ORLEANS—Buoyed by six years of success in bringing growing numbers of union members to the polls, the labor movement is gearing up to mount an even more sophisticated operation this election year—if it can find the money.

At its winter executive council meeting here, the AFL-CIO attacked the Bush administration as “the most hostile toward workers since Herbert Hoover,” and federation President John Sweeney condemned congressional inaction on worker issues as “shameful” and “disgusting.” But many unions are feeling squeezed by layoffs and competing needs, such as more organizing, and some asked that the AFL-CIO focus its work and tighten its operations.

The AFL-CIO has responded with an internal reorganization and a new proposal for financing political mobilization. In recent election cycles, the AFL-CIO has spent about \$35 million educating union members about issues, registering voters and getting them to the polls. Using its own staff and roughly 1,000 others on loan from member unions for a few months (and many more in the days just before elections), the federation has emphasized “working family” economic issues through direct contact with workers on the job and at home.

In May, presidents of all affiliates will meet to vote on a mandatory four cents per member per month payment to the AFL-CIO targeted solely for

member education and mobilization, an increase of the 6.5 cent per month voluntary dues now committed to such work. While that will yield nearly the same amount of money as in the past for future election cycles, its likely approval will leave the AFL-CIO as much as \$10 million short of its goal. Nevertheless, Sweeney insists that “we’ll have enough money to support probably the most effective mid-term election in history.”

With good prospects for Democrats winning full control of Congress, the union effort in roughly 12 key Senate and about 30 House races, in addition to 22 gubernatorial contests, could prove decisive, even though many unions talk increasingly of distancing themselves from the Democrats, either out of frustration or a desire to form alliances with Republicans.

While only a handful of unions—such as the teachers and Service Employees—still do most of the new organizing, labor’s share of the work force did not drop in 2001, and, according to AFL-CIO data, about 440,000 new workers were organized last year, a small increase from 2000. The AFL-CIO is devel-

often productivity as well—using existing technology that is cost-efficient but not implemented as widely as it should be, such as compact fluorescent light bulbs or efficient electric motors.

Barrett and Hoerner’s “Clean Energy and Jobs” report proposes a technology policy, tailored to the specific opportunities for greater efficiency in businesses, government and household use, which can both offset some of the costs of the carbon tax and increase efficiency faster than a carbon tax alone. Their proposal would not only promote energy-efficient buildings and mandate higher fuel-efficiency standards for autos and light trucks, but provide tax incentives for super-efficient vehicles and renewable energy production.

But unlike many environmentalists, Barrett and Hoerner take seriously the potential for economic disruption caused by a shift in energy policy, particularly the hardship on lower-income workers who could face higher energy costs. They would phase in the carbon tax over five years, rising to \$50 per ton of carbon, or the equivalent of about 13 cents on a gallon of gasoline.

At first, under their plan, the majority of the \$70 to \$80 billion per year in carbon taxes would be returned to individuals by refunding roughly the equivalent of the payroll taxes every worker pays on the first \$6,000 of earnings. Gradually more of the tax revenue would go to fund energy efficiency programs and less to tax credits. For most households, energy costs would be cut faster through efficiency improvements than energy prices would rise from the carbon tax.

The economists project that the carbon tax combined with this mildly progressive tax-refund program would slightly increase overall employment and have a small positive—or at worst neutral—effect on economic growth. But fossil-fuel and energy-intensive industries, they argue, could face short-term competition from businesses in countries that don’t impose carbon taxes or set tough pollution standards. To deal with those problems, Barrett and Hoerner propose that importers of energy or energy-intensive materials (like steel or aluminum) would have to pay “whatever taxes or emissions-permit fees would have been required had the products been produced in the U.S.” (Such border adjustments are already used

in the United States and Europe and are permitted under World Trade Organization rules.)

Overall, the result of such a policy shift would be dramatic environmental progress, modest economic gains and much greater national energy security. Barrett and Hoerner calculate that U.S. carbon emissions would decline by 27 percent in 2010 and by half in 2020. By 2020, gross domestic product would grow by six-tenths of a percent above what it would have otherwise, creating a net gain of 1.4 million jobs and reducing the rate of decline in manufacturing jobs. Real wages would rise, income inequality would decline slightly, and household energy bills would shrink. At the same time, oil imports would drop below the level now forecast by an amount a little larger than the total current U.S. purchases from OPEC countries. Over

The choice between jobs and the environment is a false one. We need both.

two decades, the savings would amount to more than six times the estimated oil that could be pumped from ANWR.

Barrett and Hoerner acknowledge that jobs would decline in some industries, especially coal mining and electric utilities (but not most energy-intensive manufacturing like steel). They propose that displaced workers should receive at least two years of full income and benefits and up to four years of full-time training or education (or a longer duration of income support for those workers near retirement). Communities would also receive \$10,000 in economic development funds for each job lost under their plan. Carbon taxes would finance this “just transition.”

“I think that [this report] means that if folks with good intentions get together and stick with it, they can figure out solutions to problems that address everyone’s concerns,” says Perkins,

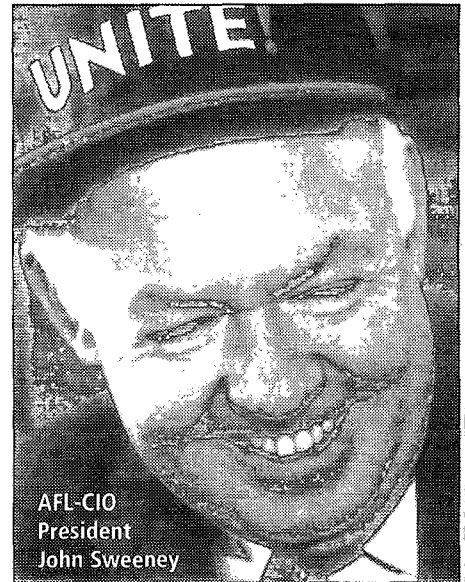
oping partnership agreements with more than 20 unions—representing four-fifths of its members—to encourage more and smarter organizing.

Besides the addition of 25 field staff to AFL-CIO organizing efforts, which represent an estimated 22 to 24 percent of the federation's budget, individual unions have been hiring thousands of new organizers in recent years and approaching organizing more strategically. The Laborers, for example, have hired 90 new organizers and plan to double their organizing budget over the next five years. The focus is not just on numbers, but on increasing the union's "market share" in specific industries and regions to give the union bargaining power, according to President Terry O'Sullivan.

The new federation budget, down about \$5 million from last year, cuts 50 out of 500 staff positions. It also reallocates much of the field mobilization staff to either politics or organizing, merges or eliminates some departments, and shifts some work to the federation's educational arm, the George Meany Center. But despite ongoing talks, the Carpenters Union—critical for both its 300,000 members' dues as well as for construction organizing—remains outside the federation.

Even with the new focus, the AFL-CIO remains an important vehicle for labor unions to move a broad, working-class agenda into the center of political debate. The federation can take on important issues where there is a labor interest but no clear union constituency, such as its current campaign to defend Enron workers and fight for reform of pensions, capital markets and corporate accountability. But the key to restoring labor power in politics or any other front remains the still elusive goal of massive new organizing.

—David Moberg



who is leaving the AFL-CIO policy staff to work at the George Meany Center. She hopes the report will trigger a debate within the labor movement, and the blue-green working group has sponsored workshops in states from New Jersey to Montana to let local labor and environmental leaders discuss the issues. Perkins thinks that change will come by developing such links between the movements. "If we don't do that at the grassroots level," she says, "you're never going to change anything."

Although it may be too late for such a grassroots movement to push the ideas in the report in this year's congressional debate, there is growing receptivity in Washington to linking "just transition" adjustments to future energy legislation.

Even if big-picture agreement on issues like energy and climate change are elusive, there are plenty of other opportunities for blue-green cooperation. For example, Perkins says, a company is poised to open a 700-employee wind energy equipment manufacturing plant in Portland, Oregon—if Congress approves wind energy production tax credits. UNITE and the Sierra Club are joining in a program to install solar rooftop panels in California. In a growing number of cities, labor and environmentalists are working together to fight sprawl as a threat both to unionization and the environment.

Steelworkers district director David Foster helped create a labor-environment alliance in the Northwest around a common fight against anti-labor and anti-environment policies of Maxxam Corporation. That experience led the union to advocate alternative energy sources for aluminum smelters in order to reduce reliance on hydropower that threatens salmon. "A healthy environment is essential to a healthy economy," he says.

Yet more unions need to turn to their allies for research and understanding of these issues, not to corporations and politicians that oppose them on nearly every other issue (as labor organizer Ray Rogers and educator Harry Kelber argue in a new effort to turn unions against ANWR exploration.) While Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao had nothing to offer labor on its key concerns when she met with the AFL-CIO executive council in late February, she did make clear that

the administration's foremost request of labor was support for Bush's energy plan—and pointedly thanked Teamsters President James Hoffa for his endorsement.

The Teamsters contend that ANWR drilling will create nearly 750,000 new jobs, but an analysis of the decade-old, industry-sponsored research behind those figures by the Center for Economic and Policy Research shows that the assumptions are deeply flawed and oil from ANWR actually would generate less than 50,000 jobs for the U.S. economy. (Some labor insiders think that Hoffa's high-profile support for Bush's energy plan is part of the union's strategy to eliminate federal supervision, which was recently reduced).

Similarly, although the UAW has joined industry in resisting higher car and truck fuel efficiency standards, a Union of Concerned Scientists study concludes that increasing fuel economy to 55 miles per gallon would yield 100,000 new auto industry jobs by 2020, while saving consumers—who obviously include workers who are union members—\$28 billion a year.

By adopting the perspective of industry and Republican strategists who have no concern for workers, unions or preserving good domestic jobs, the labor unions that abandon environmental allies are also abandoning their own members. By nearly 2-to-1, union members oppose drilling in ANWR, according to a poll conducted late last year by the Wilderness Society. Over the past decade, workers and union members consistently have expressed strong support for environmental protection in opinion polls, according to sociologist Brian Obach, even when it poses risks to jobs.

Even UAW members support higher auto efficiency more strongly than the general public. In a January poll, 84 percent of UAW members in Michigan favored requiring all cars and light trucks to get 40 miles per gallon within 10 years. While the union organized rallies to oppose higher standards, UAW members overwhelmingly rejected the argument that environmental regulation would raise car prices and cost jobs. The choice between the environment and economic justice is a false one. Both are possible. Both are necessary. Both are threatened if the alliance of the labor and environmental movements fails. ■

Blacks on the Ballot

*More African-Americans
are running for governor
than ever before*

By Salim Muwakkil

Roland Burris, an African-American making his third run for governor of Illinois, is facing a familiar challenge. The former attorney general and state comptroller must find a way to excite his core black supporters without alienating the white voters he needs to win. Burris is a serious candidate in the gubernatorial primary because of bloc voting by the black electorate, which makes up about 25 percent of Democratic primary voters. But he must downplay this support lest he be accused of playing the "race card." His white opponents, however, can proudly appeal to their ethnic supporters free from backlash. It's a vexing dilemma, but one that most black candidates seeking a multiracial mandate must confront.

But more candidates seem willing to take on that challenge. African-American aspirants are running in seven gubernatorial primaries in 2002, more than ever before. Besides Burris, two other candidates have already been elected to statewide offices. In 1992, Jim Hill became the first African-American to hold statewide office in Oregon when he was elected state treasurer. Carl McCall earned the same distinction in New York when he was elected state comptroller in 1993.

The other candidates are state senators Daryl Jones of Florida, Gary George of Wisconsin and Alma Wheeler Smith of Michigan, all Democrats. John Jenkins, a former state senator and mayor from Maine, is running as an independent candidate in his state's primary. "If I were to make a bet right now about whether there's going to be a black governor next year," says David Bositis, senior research associate at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies and one of the most knowledgeable observers of black politics, "I would put the odds at 1-in-10, or at best 2-in-10."

While those are pretty long odds, they are much better than in years past. Many white voters remain reluctant to vote for black candidates; that's one reason why former Virginia Gov. L. Douglas Wilder was the lone elected black governor in U.S. history, and why there have been only two black senators (Edward R. Brooke of Massachusetts and Carol Mosely-Braun of Illinois) since Reconstruction.



ROLAND BURRIS CAMPAIGN

Former state Attorney General Roland Burris hugs a supporter after announcing his third run for Illinois governor.

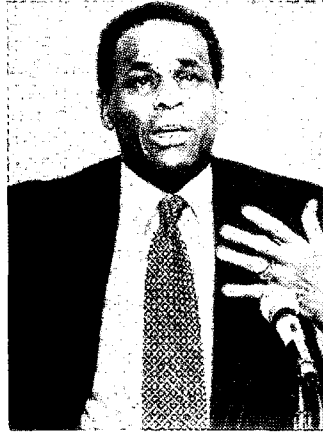
The white electorate is often hostile to candidates who use the rhetoric of racial pride to pump up black voters. This tactic may make white voters uncomfortable, but it's an outgrowth of the belief that black electoral empowerment is the next step in the civil rights movement. That belief helped transform many political campaigns into racial crusades and fueled hundreds of electoral victories; from less than 300 black elected officials in 1964 to nearly 9,000 in 2000. But it also has corralled black elected officials into parochial enclaves of political marginality.

White voters' historical aversion to black candidates informed provisions of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which, following the 1990 Census, led to the creation of black-majority political districts. There was a wide consensus within the Justice Department that black candidates couldn't win unless their districts contained electorates that were at least 65 percent black. That consensus held until Supreme Court rulings, beginning with *Shaw v. Reno* in 1993, began attacking the logic of racial redistricting.

Other opponents of the practice argued that racial redistricting made race-based politics a self-fulfilling prophecy. But supporters of black-majority districts insist there is little evidence whites are more willing to vote for black candidates now than in the past. "This country has a tremendous racial problem," Rep. James Clyburn (D-South Carolina), who twice tried and failed to win statewide office, told *USA Today*. "We don't like to admit that people are just more comfortable with people who look like them."



ALMA WHEELER SMITH CAMPAIGN



REUTERS



REUTERS

Candidates Alma Wheeler Smith and Carl McCall hope to follow in the footsteps of Carol Mosely-Braun and Douglas Wilder.

Yet those attitudes may be changing. A study that appeared in the *Emory Law Journal* last year found that black congressional candidates "always got at least one white vote in five," even in the Deep South. The study's authors, Charles S. Bullock III of the University of Georgia and Richard E. Dunn of the College of Charleston, concluded that "the electorate is increasingly willing to vote for black candidates."

That may partly explain the increase in black candidates. "This record number of black candidates is a very positive trend and represents the continuing political maturity of the African-American community," notes Robert Starks, professor of political science and executive director of the newly formed Harold Washington Institute for Research and Policy Studies at Northeastern Illinois University. "It's just a logical progression for black elected officials who have nowhere else to go, politically speaking."

Starks contends that the inherent limitations of racial representation have compelled black candidates to widen their horizons. But will their wider focus force them to look beyond the special concerns of black Americans? And if it does, will newly emerging black politicians have any special relationship or obligation to their racial group? Should they? Starks argues that African-Americans' unique history places uncommon obligations on black politicians. "Of course they must make wider appeals to broader constituencies," he says, "but they must maintain the centrality of their people's interests."

So black politicians seeking statewide office must master the choreography of contemporary politics. "Modern politicians learn how to tailor their message to differing constituencies without being charged with duplicity," Bositis explains. "It's a subtle dance they all learn from experience they gain in the field."

As black politicians increasingly win what Bositis calls "feeder" offices (like attorney general and secretary of state) they will gain the skills—and wider visibility—needed to win a gubernatorial or Senate seat. Black candidates also must raise enough money to compete with the well-heeled candidates they often face. This is a particularly daunting problem because their political base lacks wealthy contributors and a tradition of political donations. And African-American candidates, especially black men, must be relentlessly reassuring to win over a multiracial constituency. "More black women have been elected to statewide office," Bositis says, "because they're not as threatening."

As for the current black gubernatorial candidates, neither Starks, Bositis nor any other political pundit gives them much of a chance even to win their primary races. Burris and McCall are the strongest candidates. Both men have held statewide offices that are concerned with budgetary issues, another important element. Illinois has a black population of a bit more than 15 percent, and New York is nearly 16 percent black. Both men are the kind of "crossover" candidates who once were derided by militant advocates of black political empowerment. Neither candidate is "tainted" by activist pasts, yet both still depend on a solid and disproportionate bloc of black voters. However, both are pitted against strong opponents in the primaries and, should they win, in the general election.

Oregon's Jim Hill fits the same mold as Burris and McCall, having been elected twice as state treasurer. But Hill is running in a state that has a black population of barely 2 percent. All of the other candidates are long shots, Bositis contends, but they are laying important groundwork for future campaigns. "Maine has incredibly quirky politics and weird issues that seldom come up in other places," he says. "So maybe Jenkins has a better chance."

Maine's black population is less than half of 1 percent. But some analysts have argued that states with the smallest African-American population ironically may stand the best chance of electing a black candidate statewide. Bositis agrees that race tends not to be an issue in states with small black populations. But, he notes, the probability that such a state will elect a black governor remains very small.

What will it take to elect another black governor or senator? Luck, in terms of political timing, quality of the opposition and the mood of the electorate, is an important element, Bositis insists. He points to the example of Carol Mosely-Braun, the former Illinois senator. In the 1992 Democratic primary, she ran against two white candidates, including incumbent Alan Dixon, who went after each other and split the vote. She also benefited from the backlash to the appointment of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas in the so-called Year of the Woman, which lured suburban female voters into her camp. On Election Day, she faced a weak Republican opponent. "Without those quirky elements it's unlikely she would have won," says Bositis, and, indeed, she lost her bid for re-election.

Many factors have to break right for a black candidate to succeed in a statewide race, but those long odds haven't discouraged this bumper crop of aspirants. And, if aspirations are a sign of progress, here we are. ■

VOTE for Your Favorite Dictator



By G. Pascal Zachary

ACCRA, GHANA

The scene one recent Friday night in the Burma Camp military barracks here was unthinkable a year ago—before this West African country held its freest national elections since its independence in 1957. Inside the barracks, a string of senior military officers pledged their support for Ghana's year-old civilian government—and vowed not to assist in any attempt to overthrow the government's popular president, John Kufuor.

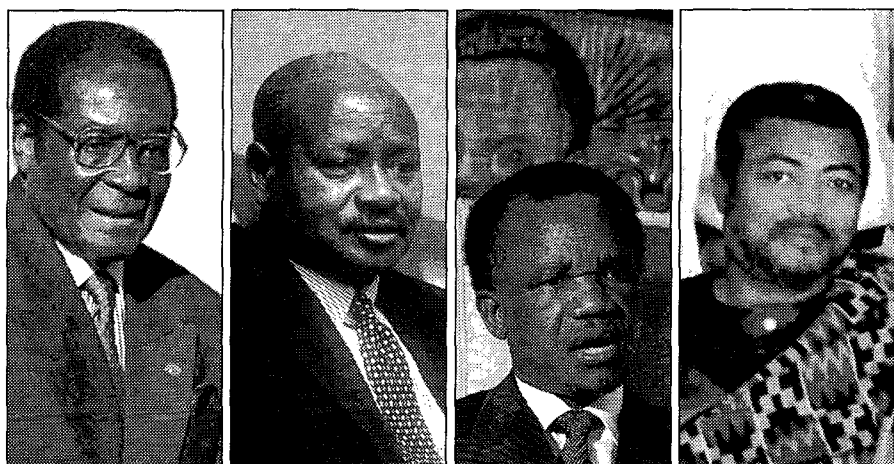
Last year, Kufuor, a lawyer and longtime critic of military rule, defeated the hand-picked successor of Ghana's longtime-strongman, former coup leader Jerry Rawlings, in an election widely viewed as the fairest and least violent in sub-Saharan Africa for many years.

That after a year in office, Kufuor still feels the need to hear repeated loyalty pledges from his military command—and has installed his own brother as defense minister to watch over the soldiers—suggests that Ghana's democracy is still fledgling. "Elections are critical to the process of reform in Ghana," says Harruna Attah, editor of the *Mail*, a daily newspaper that relentlessly criticized the former regime. "We are not in the clear yet, but the likelihood of the military preempting the will of the voters is growing less."

Indeed, observers openly say that should Kufuor lose the presidency in an election scheduled in three years, the country would be strengthened by the exercise of transferring power from one leader to another without violence. The country's transition via electoral democracy remains a model for the region, a point emphasized by British Prime Minister Tony Blair, who visited here in February, and echoed by many Ghanaians.

Unfortunately for Africa, Ghana is the exception, not the rule. Elections remain stage-managed affairs in the sub-Saharan. Ruling parties go to great lengths to win ballots, and dictators have taken to burnishing their image by imposing sham elections on their populations. To be sure, "elections are freer and fairer than they were ten years ago," says Walter Kansteiner, undersecretary of state and the senior official on Africa policy in the Bush administration. "But are they perfect? Heavens no. There are backsliders."

Rigged elections are widespread throughout Africa, and not just in Zimbabwe.



Left to right: Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe, Uganda's Yoweri Museveni, Zambia's Frederick Chiluba, Ghana's Jerry Rawlings

Backsliders indeed. In Zambia earlier this year, the government stole the election from the opposition party. In Madagascar, the ruling party held an election so filled with inaccuracies that the opposition has paralyzed the country, calling for its candidate to be declared the winner rather than submit to a run-off election (because neither candidate achieved a majority in the official tally).

Then there is the case of Zimbabwe, where independence leader Robert Mugabe seeks re-election as president on March 9 after 22 years in office. He faces stiff opposition from the Movement for a Democratic Change (MDC), which two years ago nearly won control of the parliament. Facing intense criticism from European governments, especially former colonial master Britain, Mugabe can't cancel the elections, yet he has unleashed wave after wave of withering violence against members of the MDC. Killings and beatings of party members—at the hands of Mugabe supporters—are common.

"The environment for democratization is very, very hostile," says Morgan Tsvangirai, the leader of the MDC and Mugabe's chief presidential opponent. In the weeks leading up to the election, Tsvangirai has seen his supporters beaten and killed, and the country's newspapers have been

bombed and threatened by draconian press controls. Many people think that Tsvangirai, the son of a bricklayer and a former miner, would win a fair election. But "right now the conditions for a fair election do not exist in Zimbabwe," says Kansteiner.

Better a flawed election than none, Tsvangirai insists. While disappointed by the human costs of the March ballot, he wants the poll to go ahead. "We cannot abandon the people," he says on the telephone from Harare. "The people want change and they are going to obtain it in spite of all the obstacles."

As *In These Times* went to press, Tsvangirai was formally charged with treason by authorities, who claim that he had been plotting to assassinate Mugabe. Released after questioning (but still facing the charges), Tsvangirai has vowed to continue his campaign. Observers say that the election will likely go on as planned.

Why are Mugabe and other African autocrats holding elections in the first place if they can't bear the possibility of a change in power? Simply, foreign donors demand it. Under pressure from the international community, African governments are holding more contested elections than ever before—and these elections are getting more scrutiny too. In Ghana's election, the United States paid for much of the election costs and an independent monitoring effort that effectively prevented ballot-rigging. Even so, when voters defeated the candidate backed by Rawlings, the old dictator tried to organize a coup, rallying loyalists in the military. He only relented after British and American diplomats prevailed on him.

Rawlings still lives in Accra, periodically blasting Kufuor and implying that a military coup is inevitable. But even he found elections inescapable. After 10 years as a dictator, he "democratized" himself in 1992 by winning a rigged election for president and then won a second term four years later. Like Rawlings, many of Africa's "big men" and their ruling parties try mightily—and violently—to rig elections.

Consider the election in Uganda last March. President Yoweri Museveni, who came to power in a military coup in 1986, sought a new five-year term. Museveni is credited by foreign donors, who pay for half of the government's budget, for lifting Uganda out of the disorder that characterized the infamous regime of Idi Amin and his lesser-known successor, Milton Obote. In bringing a measure of growth and order to Uganda, Museveni relied on what he calls his "Movement" system, essentially a one-party state borne from the leadership of his guerilla army.

Museveni argues that Ugandans—and by extension, all black Africans—aren't ready to handle party politics, which he thinks distract a society from important issues and spawn tribalism and in-fighting. In recent years, however, both Ugandans and foreign-aid donors grew more insistent that he allow the formation of multiple political parties. Last year Museveni agreed to hold a contested election, and, deter-

mined to win handily, he suffered a setback when his personal physician—and the husband of a Movement parliamentarian—decided to run against him. While observers think Museveni would have won a free and fair poll, he took no chances and viciously attacked his opponent, whose leadership consisted chiefly of renegade Movement members.

"The election exposed us to violence at the hands of Museveni's security forces," says Okwir Rabwoni, a member of Uganda's parliament and an opposition leader. Raboni was arrested weeks before the election, jailed and tortured. Museveni, who won the election with an official tally of 69 percent, so hounded his electoral opponents that many, including Raboni, were forced into exile.

All this election violence has Africans asking whether elections are worth it, if they are only for show. "If Western donors are going to insist on elections, they should provide the money and the real support to ensure that these don't turn into pretexts for violence against the government's opponents," says Sam Doe, director of Accra's West Africa Network for Peace. "They don't do enough now, and without more protections, elections will inspire more violence."

Doe worries especially about Sierra Leone, where he helped mediate a peace deal between warring factions. Pushed by the British, the country's rump government is holding an election in May. The last time an election was held, rebel groups under now-jailed Foday Sankoh chopped off the arms of prospective voters as a message against the electoral process—in many African countries, voters

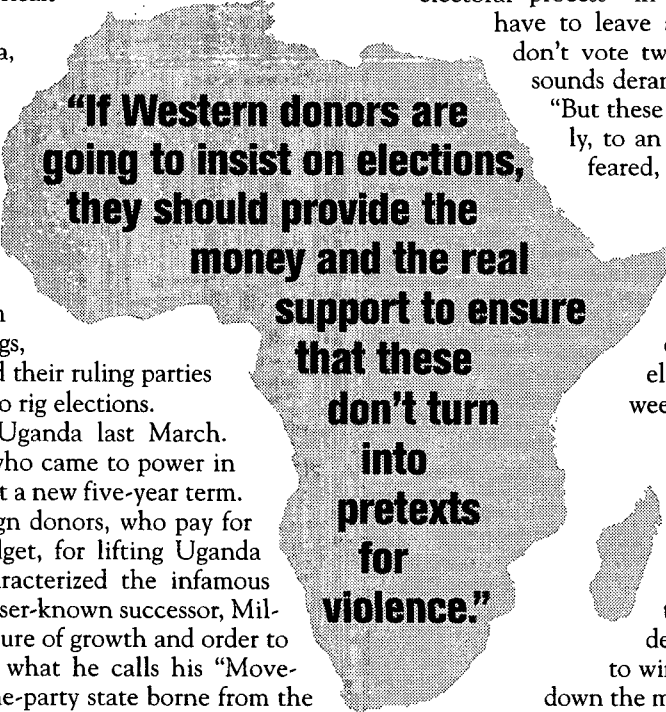
have to leave a thumbprint to make sure they don't vote twice. "Chopping off people's arms sounds deranged, and it is horrible," Doe says.

"But these acts were linked, however insanely, to an election in which the opposition feared, for some reasons, would be unfair."

Democratically elected governments, meanwhile, don't always perform. Nigeria's mounting problems—coming under a civilian government, freely elected in 1999—further suggest that elections aren't a panacea. In recent weeks, Africa's most populous and oil-rich country has been rocked by crime waves, ethnic strife and, in early February, a mysterious explosion at a military arms depot in Lagos, Nigeria's largest city. The explosion killed more than 1,000 people. Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, who wants to win re-election next year, has played down the mayhem, seeming unfeeling to ordi-

nary people and evoking nostalgia for military governments which, however corrupt, at least kept order.

"The lesson of Nigeria is that fair elections may only produce more unstable conditions," says Ibiba Don Pedro, a leading Nigerian journalist who writes for the country's *Guardian* newspaper. "Not because democracies are inherently weak, but because the problems they inherit—the legacies of dictatorship—are so great." ■



"If Western donors are going to insist on elections, they should provide the money and the real support to ensure that these don't turn into pretexts for violence."

A NEW DÉTENTE?

The Bush Administration Cozies up to China

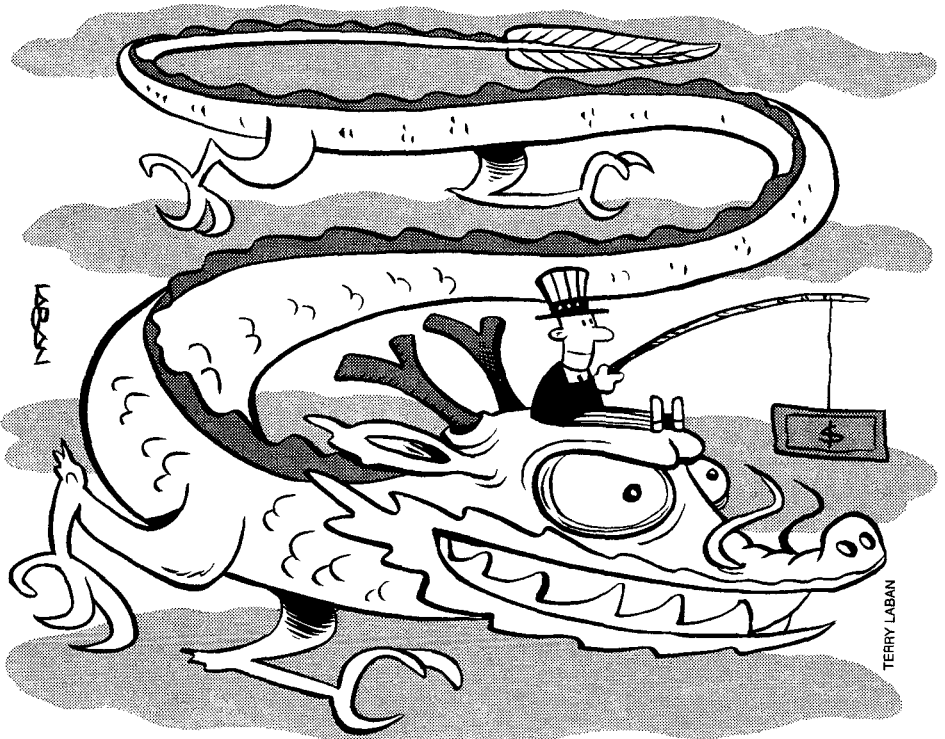
By Joshua Schenker

China's relations with the West have come a long way in just a year. Only last April, President Bush described Beijing as a "strategic competitor" and seemed ready to launch military action over an American spy plane downed near the Chinese coast. Without a doubt, the combination of the war on terrorism and a downturn in the global economy have pushed Beijing and Washington closer together—symbolized by Bush's February visit to China, his second since September.

In a reversal of its more hostile posture toward Beijing, the Bush administration now sees China as a bulwark against global depression, and, compared to Osama bin Laden, Chinese President Jiang Zemin now looks like a benign, law-abiding grandfather. China seems closer than ever to becoming a "normal" player in world affairs. Still, closer ties between China and the West, as well as China's improving economic image, cannot conceal the fact that Beijing's foreign policy remains unilateralist and dangerous, both to its East Asian neighbors and the United States, or that China continues violating the human rights of its own citizens.

Though Beijing wants to use its accession to the World Trade Organization and the war on terrorism to consolidate its role as a world leader, China has proven far more willing to play by neoliberal economic rules than to observe international norms regarding regional security, human rights and diplomacy. "It's hard to tell whether they're genuinely interested in better relations and less terrorism," says one Western diplomat in Bangkok, "or if they just want to boost their influence as a means of challenging American power."

It is difficult to overstate China's recent economic development. The country's combination of huge pools of cheap labor and an enormous but still growing domestic market has proven unstoppable. China is now absorbing



almost 70 percent of all foreign direct investment into Asia, and Beijing has amassed foreign currency reserves worth more than \$200 billion. Meanwhile, China is increasingly moving into higher-value industries. In 2000, China's high-tech exports grew 50 percent, to \$37 billion, and these numbers will only increase now that the mainland has entered the WTO. WTO accession probably will have a dramatic impact on China's aging state-run enterprises. Morgan Stanley estimates that state companies will fire 20 million workers as a result of WTO membership (although many economists believe job creation in the private sector will absorb a high percentage of former state employees).

China's WTO membership particularly concerns its East Asian neighbors, who are still struggling with the aftermath of the 1997 Asian financial crisis. Already, investment flows to Southeast Asia have fallen precipitously as foreign investment into China has increased. Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad, one of Asia's most ardent nationalists, told reporters that China's ability to attract investment "will cost us in Southeast Asia." Meanwhile, India is so concerned about Chinese competition that it has forbidden Infosys Technologies, a leading Indian software company, from training Chi-

nese engineers. Washington too is anxious. During an otherwise upbeat joint news conference with Jiang in February, Bush reminded China—one of the world's notorious pirates of intellectual property—that the People's Republic must “adhere to the rules of the World Trade Organization.”

But China also is a potential engine for economic growth, a massive market for certain Southeast Asian industries—especially media, travel and other service sector firms. Recognizing this, China and Southeast Asian countries have started exploring the possibility of a free-trade zone. Since more than 35 million ethnic Chinese live in Southeast Asia, the region's service companies are well positioned to grab market share in the mainland. Western nations stand to benefit as well. U.S. exports to China were up 20 percent in 2001; American farmers should reap enormous rewards from lower Chinese tariffs on agricultural goods; and China soon may become America's fifth-largest export market.

On the economic front, China actually may be a stabilizing, positive force. When the Asian financial crisis wreaked havoc on Southeast Asia, China handed out cash to several countries, allowing international financial institutions to avoid bailing out some indebted economies. Since the crisis began in 1997, China has loaned Thailand more than \$1 billion, provided Laos with a range of interest-free loans to help fight inflation, and given Cambodia more than \$200 million in aid. More recently, Beijing's decision not to devalue its currency helped to prevent Asia's economic problems from worsening. And according to Ellen Frost, a fellow at Washington's Institute for International Economics, “The Chinese government has undertaken a heroic effort to adapt to globalization by wrenching China's distorted economy into greater conformity with a market-oriented, rules-based world order.”

Though some economists feared that China's admission to the WTO would exacerbate human rights abuses in the People's Republic, WTO accession has not made the situation worse. Abuses remain rife, especially in factories in Guangdong province near Hong Kong as well as in lower-value industries like toy production. But even many human rights activists now admit that abuses were likely to continue whether China joined the WTO or not, and some activists have been pleasantly surprised with the amount of foreign oversight of labor conditions Chinese businesses now are allowing in their factories.

In political and diplomatic matters, however, the evidence is less clear that China is becoming an upstanding global citizen. On terrorism and security issues in recent months, China has appeared to stand behind the United States and its allies. Beijing has taken part, along with South Korea and Japan, in “Asian Plus Three” meetings, which seek to prevent regional security problems in Asia. China also has stepped up diplomatic efforts, wooing a range of Asian leaders with frequent bilateral meetings and even piano recitals.

Immediately after September 11, Jiang expressed support for the United States and sealed China's border with Afghanistan. Since the attacks, Beijing and Washington have shared some intelligence on Islamic terrorist groups, and Bush and Jiang have created a new bilateral mechanism that will allow them to speak directly with each other during emergencies. The *People's Daily*, a mouthpiece of China's Communist Party, announced in a recent essay that the September 11 attack “has fully proved that China is a friend of the U.S.” During Bush's February visit, he praised China for its contributions to the war and invited Jiang and Hu Jintao, Jiang's probable successor, to Washington in the fall.

However, despite Jiang's statement immediately after September 11, he did not endorse military strikes against Afghanistan. Meanwhile, some Chinese leaders have circulated a video that glorifies the downing of the World Trade Center, and intelligence sharing with Washington reportedly hasn't been very productive. According to Minxin Pei, a China specialist at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, a Washington

think tank, “Compared with more forthcoming expressions of solidarity from other leading members of the international community, China's response may appear wanting.”

What's more, China continues to ship missile components and equipment that could be used to manufacture chemical weapons to Iran and Pakistan, in violation of export control agreements Beijing made with Washington during the final days of the Clinton administration. Over the past decade, Beijing also has sold at least \$1 billion worth of arms to Burma's pariah regime, which is now building a nuclear reactor. Beijing also continues to construct new missile bases near the Taiwan Strait, while refusing to restrain its navy from making provocative incursions into regional waters, most notably

the area near the Spratly Islands and the Sea of Japan.

Perhaps more worrisome, China appears to be using the war on terrorism to crack down on its own ethnic and religious minorities and threaten the “province” of Taiwan. Several days before Bush arrived in Beijing, Freedom House, a Washington-based human rights organization, in conjunction with a group of Chinese exiles, released a report (containing secret Chinese government documents) that alleged Beijing is persecuting Chinese Christians, arresting nearly 24,000 of them in recent years on various charges, many of which were trumped-up allegations of “belonging to an illegal cult.” At nearly the same time, the Vatican's news agency reported that China had detained more than 50 Catholic clergy.

Meanwhile, according to Hong Kong media, Beijing has developed a “political re-education campaign” for more than



Chinese President Jiang Zemin

OLEG NIKSHINGETTY

8,000 Muslim imams in Xinjiang, an oil-rich province in Western China. After September 11, Beijing alleged that some groups of Uighurs, the main Muslim ethnic group in Xinjiang, have links with al-Qaeda—a contention few experts support. Citing these alleged al-Qaeda ties, in recent weeks the Chinese government has arrested many Uighurs and closed mosques in Xinjiang. (The Chinese media rarely report arrests of Uighurs, so most information on Xinjiang comes from organizations outside China.)

Similarly, China has tried to stamp out Falun Gong, a spiritual group whose activities center on breathing exercises that has become a locus of opposition to the government. Even some top Beijing officials have been surprised by how forcefully the government has battled Falun Gong, which has seen hundreds of its members jailed, sent to labor camps, and, at times, tortured and executed.

Yet in most of these cases, critics say, the “guilty” parties did not espouse any violence or pose any kind of armed threat to the state. “Chinese authorities have not discriminated between peaceful and violent dissent, [but] have used these claims [of terrorism] to justify ruthless repression in Xinjiang,” said a report released in October by Human Rights Watch. “Legal proceedings against people arrested in Xinjiang do not meet even the minimum guarantees of fairness.”

Beijing’s crackdown hasn’t gone unnoticed, but as the war on terrorism proceeds, the Bush administration isn’t making human rights or responsible diplomacy a priority in its relationship with China. At the February meeting in Beijing, Bush gently prodded China to improve its record on religious freedom and only briefly raised the issue of arms proliferation. Though Bush and Jiang smiled and joked during their press conference, the two leaders admitted that they had not reached an agreement on Chinese exports of missile components.

At the September meeting in Shanghai, Bush largely ignored the issue of Taiwan, and in February he adopted a highly conciliatory tone, urging Taipei’s leaders not to provoke Beijing—a sign the president was highly unwilling to provoke China, since some members of his own administration are strong supporters of the Taiwan government. “We have hoped that the government and some U.S. companies would push for some of these human rights issues, especially since developing a culture of rights and the rule of law would benefit these companies,” says Mike Jendrzczyk, Asia director for Human Rights Watch. “So far, we haven’t seen it.”

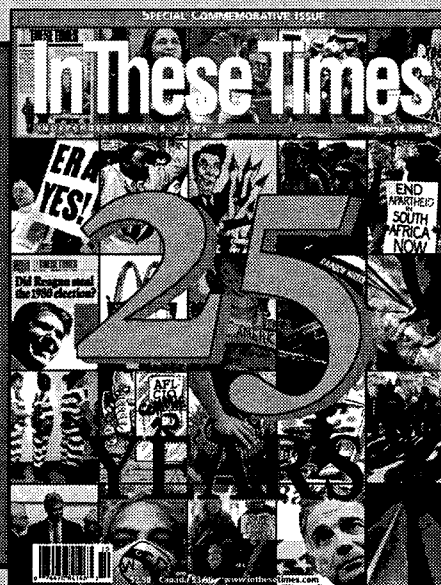
But the current détente may not last long, especially as a new generation of younger, Western-oriented but more nationalist Chinese come to power. In the next few years, predicts Sunai Phasuk, a Bangkok-based regional politics specialist, China will become more confident and more willing to challenge U.S. influence close to China’s borders—in countries such as Thailand, Uzbekistan and Cambodia. Consequently, administration sources say, many of Bush’s more hawkish advisers haven’t really changed their position on China—they have merely muted their concerns for the time being. ■

Joshua Schenker is the pen name of a journalist who has extensively covered East Asian politics. He wrote about the spread of the war on terrorism to Southeast Asia in the November 26 issue.

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In These Times

Land and Freedom

By James North

Those of us who witnessed the old South African system of white supremacy first-hand wince when we hear the word "apartheid" applied too casually elsewhere. Apartheid was defined by the United Nations as a crime

The New Intifada: Resisting Israel's Apartheid

Edited by Roane Carey
Verso
354 pages, \$20

against humanity, and it is not a term to be used carelessly. So when a new book appears subtitled *Resisting Israel's Apartheid*, a respectful caution is in order.

This up-to-date survey is an impressive collection of 20 articles, edited with skill by *The Nation's* Roane Carey, with contributions by Palestinians, Israelis and others, ranging from eyewitness accounts of the latest phase of the conflict to original political and economic analysis. The tone throughout is calm, sober and understanding. The book contains facts and perspectives that are largely ignored by the mainstream American press, which has been astonishing in its one-sidedness. But, in the end, does the book substantiate its subtitle—that Israeli rule over the Palestinian people is a kind of apartheid?

One good place to start is with simple geography. Edward Said, the renowned Palestinian intellectual and activist who has two contributions in *The New Intifada*, points out that "misrepresentation has made it almost impossible for the American public to understand the geographical basis of the events, in this, the most geographical of contests."

First, there is "Israel," a single nation that covers 78 percent of the original British mandate territory. Then there is "Palestine," a nation-in-waiting in two parts, Gaza and the West Bank, that constitutes the remaining 22 percent. Israeli troops have occupied Palestine since the

1967 Six Day War. Even though hundreds of thousands of Palestinians are refugees or the descendants of refugees from "Israel," most Palestinians recognize Israel and will settle for their own state in that 22 percent.

But now it gets more complicated. Over the past 20 years or so, about 200,000 Israelis, with the military and political support of the Israeli government, have moved into Palestine, confiscated land and made permanent homes there. Several contributors point out that these big enclaves are violations of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which "prohibits the occupying power from making permanent changes to the occupied territory or from settling part of its population there." No country in the world, not even the United States, recognizes the legitimacy of this mass movement of Israelis.

Here is where the language of euphemism gets interesting. The mainstream U.S. press uniformly locates these Israeli enclaves in the neutral-sounding "West Bank" and "Gaza." The

It comes as quite a shock, therefore, when you travel just southeast of Jerusalem on the road to Bethlehem and run into Har Homa, a 10-story fortified complex under construction that will house 32,500 Israelis. Har Homa is not alone; since Yasser Arafat, Yitzak Rabin and Bill Clinton came together on the White House lawn in September 1993 to approve the Oslo accords that were supposed to bring a lasting peace, the number of Israeli settlers has risen from 116,000 to 200,000. The Palestinian people hear about a peace process, but what they actually saw was more and more colonists taking over their land.

One look at the useful maps in this book makes it clear why the Israeli offer at Camp David in July 2000 was not the generous concession that has been portrayed in the United States. Israel still planned to annex most of the enclaves outright, and also maintain control over Palestinian border areas and corridors. The state of Palestine, already split into two parts, would lose even more territory and be fragmented into a patchwork quilt of multiple chunks, pieces and strips.

Anyone who knew apartheid South Africa would look at these speckled maps with recognition. The most photogenic features of the South African system were called "petty" apartheid: the segregated restaurants, railway carriages, beaches and public toilets, with their ugly signs. But "grand" apartheid was actually much more important: the territorial segregation of the country into "white" areas, 87 percent of the country that included the big cities and the best farmland, and "black" areas—fragmented chunks called Bantustans. This horseshoe-shaped archipelago of misery around the nation's rim constituted just 13 percent of the land area, and was the only place where blacks had the permanent right to live and own land.

But you did see plenty of black people, millions of them, working and living, often under terrible conditions, in "white" South Africa. They were there as "temporary sojourners," migrant workers who built the South African economy into the most powerful in Africa but could be



Not exactly an equal match.

courageous Israeli human rights organization B'tselem insists on a more accurate name: the Occupied Territories of Palestine. What's more, the illegal enclaves are always called "settlements," a word that conjures up an image of small, beleaguered outposts, huddling in the stony biblical landscape, peopled by simple pioneers.

ejected to the impoverished, overcrowded Bantustans at any time.

This is where the comparison with Israel and Palestine becomes more arguable. One of the most important contributions to *The New Intifada* is the survey of the Palestinian economy by a tireless researcher at Harvard's Center for Middle Eastern Studies named Sara Roy. You wonder why someone like this remarkable woman, who has spent years studying Palestine, is not a regular guest on *Meet the Press*, instead of the same talking heads, most of whom sound like they have never set foot in a Palestinian refugee camp.

Until 1967, Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza were not allowed into Israel. (About one-fifth of the citizens of Israel proper are Palestinian; their experience as second-class citizens since Israel was founded in 1948 is another part of the story, which is also well covered in this book.) But after Israel occupied the West Bank and Gaza, as much as 40 percent of the total Palestinian work force started crossing into Israel as migrant workers. They, like their counterparts in South Africa, worked mainly in relatively low-paid and dirty jobs that Israelis themselves were increasingly hesitant to take.

Palestine became dependent on the earnings of these migrant workers. Then, starting in the early '90s, Israel started to apply its "closure" policy, sharply restricting the movement of Palestinian working people into Israel (and within Palestine itself). Roy points out that Palestinian unemployment rose from 3 percent in 1992 to 28 percent in 1996; per capita income fell 37 percent; and "poverty, especially among children, is now visible in a manner not seen for at least twenty-five years."

Israel justifies closure as a security measure, although Roy points out that "the Israeli security establishment itself has stated that closure is of limited value against extremist attacks." She, along with most Palestinians, contends that its main function is really "as a form of collective punishment against the Palestinian people."

We do occasionally read mainstream press accounts of how Israeli military checkpoints inside the Occupied Territories are a delay and inconvenience to people there, although the impact is

greater when you see for yourself teen-age Israeli soldiers deciding whether Palestinian grandfathers can pass though to visit the 1,400-year-old Dome of the Rock mosque in Jerusalem—while Israelis whiz along nearby on special Israeli-only bypass roads.

But closure is more than the indignity of having soldiers speaking another language deciding where you can go in your own

Anyone who knew South African apartheid would look upon today's maps of Israel and Palestine with recognition.

country. It is economic warfare, and Roy reports that "hunger is now a fact of life for the majority of people, as is the despair and rage that attend it." This harsh economic reality, based on territorial segregation, migrant labor and by far the longest military occupation in the world today, is nearly ignored by the mainstream American press.

So is this "apartheid"? One danger is that the word will alienate people who sympathize with Israel but will listen to criticism provided they do not perceive it as inflammatory. The U.N. General Assembly's vote back in 1975 that

"Zionism is a form of racism" may have made a settlement even harder to reach, by weakening the peace camp within Israel and among its supporters elsewhere.

Yet certain Israelis themselves are not so squeamish. Edward Said points out one of the facts that surprises first-time visitors to Israel: You find a much broader range of opinion in some of the big Israeli newspapers than you will ever see in the United States. Meron Benvenisti, an impassioned critic of Israeli policy who appears regularly in *Ha'aretz* (the local equivalent of the *New York Times*, available in an English-language edition), regularly uses the word "apartheid" to describe Israel's policy in the Occupied Territories.

In the end, describing Israel and Palestine accurately probably matters more than the particular word you choose to sum up the situation. *The New Intifada* demonstrates calmly and convincingly that the harsh Israeli occupation—political, military and economic—is the cause of the present uprising, not something irrational or hateful in the Arab or Muslim character. So if the word "apartheid" shocks open-minded people into taking a closer look, it may be justified. ■

James North lived in southern Africa from 1978 to 1983, reporting for *In These Times* and other publications. He visited Israel and Palestine for the first time last year. His e-mail address is jamesnorth@mail.com.

Disasters in Waiting

By Ian Williams

A failed state is one in which failure of polices is never considered sufficient reason to abandon them," a Pakistani diplomat

Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia

By Ahmed Rashid
Yale University Press
281 pages, \$24

tells Ahmed Rashid near the end of *Jihad*. Well, there goes the United States. Nowhere but Afghanistan and Central Asia has the world's only superstate failed quite so spectacularly, and perhaps

nowhere else is it setting itself up for a fall with such grim predictability.

Washington, through its anti-Soviet Pakistani proxies, effectively bankrolled the most reactionary and callous forms of Islam in Afghanistan—which eventually ended up providing a base for the events of September 11. And in *Jihad*, Rashid shows how Washington has tried to extract oil from the troubled steppes of Central Asia at any cost, supporting ex-Communist dictators who repress democracy, suppress even moderate Islamic movements, and enrich their families and henchmen while casting their populations into grinding poverty.

Like most observers, Rashid blames these policies for the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the region.

For millennia, the Silk Road brought riches to Central Asia but also put it in the path of successive waves of nomadic invasions from the plains of Siberia. The region has Turkic speakers like the Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz and Turkomans, intermingled with the Tajiks, more Persian in language and

attempted co-option of official Islam by ex-Communists who had seized power as nationalists when the Soviet Union fell apart, they too turned to repression, leaving a vacuum to be seized by the various well-funded forms of atavistic Islamic fundamentalism emanating from Pakistan or Saudi Arabia.

Rashid offers especially interesting insights into the way that many regional, tribal and clan connections dominated the local Communist parties. Even before

image-building that they acquiesced so thoroughly when Nursultan Nazarbaev's Kazakh tribes took all the key positions in the new government, soon making him one of the richest men in the world. (After all, for 70 years the republic had had a titular Kazakh in charge and Kazakh was the official language, even though it was as rare in Almaty as Gaelic in Dublin.)

Washington's sole concern throughout has been to ensure that Kazakh oil does not go through Russia or Iran, but through Turkey. As long as Nazarbaev does not deny that possibility, he has been assured of regular visits from both the Clinton and Bush administrations.

Rashid also examines the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (whose multiethnic components, incidentally, must communicate with each other in Russian), which fought alongside the Taliban. The IMU forayed from Afghan bases into Uzbekistan, where its main recruiting agent is President Islam Karimov, whose regime Beria could have designed (without the social benefits of education, health or employment). The major difference with Stalin's time is that the arbitrary arrests, show trials and concentration camps are now combined with U.S. training and aid for the armed forces.

Since September 11 and Karimov's subsequent provision of bases and facilities for U.S. troops, he can do no wrong according to Washington. The IMF team that had quit Tashkent in disgust at the regime's rampant kleptomania suddenly returned. The State Department dropped Uzbekistan off its list of religious persecutors, even as Uzbeks were arrested, jailed and tortured for crimes such as sporting a beard—taken as *prima facie* evidence of IMU membership.

In fact, Rashid points out, there is much more popular support for Hizb Ut-Tahir (HT), a millennial but so far non-military movement, which looks forward to the re-establishment of the caliphate. Apart from praying hard, they have less of a program to advance this date than the average Christian rightist waiting for the Second Coming. But since the local regimes have repressed all political manifestations of Islam, and treat HT members with the same savagery they treat suspected IMU



Pakistani journalist Ahmed Rashid.

culture. The various groups coexisted, not always in harmony, but often in the same cities and villages.

The Russian Revolution saw Bolshevik rule imposed after bitter guerrilla struggles; Stalin then divided the area into five allegedly ethnic-based Soviet republics. Their boundaries were intentionally drawn to cut off cities from their hinterlands and to ensure that each new republic would include a sizeable minority of its neighbors' peoples. Of course, the purpose was to ensure that all the republics had an omnipotent minority of Russians or Russified locals who, between them, would make these borders irrelevant.

The Soviet Union isolated these republics from all their traditional commercial and cultural links to the south and west. Within this proto-Iron Curtain, the various modernizing and indigenous strands of Islam were curtailed or suppressed. The Soviets may have brought education, and some degree of women's rights, but forced collectivization, colonialist condescension and outright mass murder left much bitter resentment.

After a short period of tolerance and

the collapse of the Soviet Union, these republics were outstanding for the degree of nepotism, bribery and corruption that such networks made possible. Yet in the cities, at least, there was a large movement for democracy and, briefly, a lively free press before the new regimes took hold. Except perhaps in Uzbekistan, there is evidence that a majority in Central Asia would have preferred a

U.S. policy in the former Soviet republics of Central Asia helps to sow the seeds of more terrorism.

reformed Soviet Union with more genuine local autonomy to the independence they did not actually seek—but that had been thrust upon them by Boris Yeltsin's plans to remove Gorbachev.

In Kazakhstan, more than half the population was Slavic, and it is a testament to the efficiency of Soviet

members, Rashid sensibly deduces that they may decide that armed action is the way to go. Islam never claimed to be a pacifist creed, even if Muslims historically have been far more tolerant of rival faiths than institutional Christianity.

Indeed, Rashid's main thesis is that if these Muslim groups were allowed to campaign openly, they would connect with the older, more tolerant Sufi traditions of the region. He concludes that despite the very alien-ness of these sects and movements to the region's tradi-

tions, the regimes' repression has forced them to unite. The dictators are driving them into the arms of militants.

And yet Rashid remains optimistic, and hopes that since the regimes have now joined in the war against al-Qaeda, "they have given their countries a tremendous opportunity for change, economic development and democracy. The gratitude of the West, of Russia, and of China can be called upon" for development and assistance. "The

chance is there. It is for Central Asia—and the world—to take it."

Up to a point. Looking at Washington's reversion to the worldview of Donald Rumsfeld and the unmitigated joy of the regimes at their new license to repress, even as a born-again atheist I can almost understand an ordinary Central Asian *mujahed* preferring to take his chances on the virgins in Paradise. ■

Ian Williams is U.S. editor for the *Institute for War & Peace Reporting*.



Play It Again, Sam

By Joshua Klein

In 1987, an indignant Morrissey railed against opportunistic record reissues in the lyrics to "Paint a Vulgar Picture," from the final Smiths studio album, *Strangeways, Here We Come*: "Reissue! Repackage! Repackage! Re-evaluate the songs, double-pack with a photograph. Extra track and a tacky badge."

Fifteen years later, and there are now more Smiths compilations and collections than actual Smiths albums. The reissue campaign is undoubtedly what accounted for the rise of the compact disc, inspiring fans to go out and repurchase their favorite catalog albums for the second, third or maybe even fourth time in their quest for better fidelity.

Yet for at least the first 10 years of compact disc history, albums were adapted to the new format with nary an attempt to preserve the sound of the crystal-clear masters. The first few waves of CDs were slipshod exercises, definitely helping to fuel the quixotic "vinyl sounds better" movement. But as engineers and artists got a better grasp of the new technology,

the potential of the medium was finally met—and then record labels had another excuse to re-release their valuable back catalogs yet again. The lucre brought in from double (and triple) dipping into the vaults kept record companies flush.

From a fan's perspective, a decade-plus of this practice has been both risible and a godsend. The 25-disc series of Fela Kuti reissues, for example, is a goldmine of tunes, but it nevertheless poses a financial burden several times greater than the average yearly income in Fela's native Nigeria. And the sonic upgrades can cut both ways. Blondie's multi-platinum albums sound even more rickety and uneven now that they're free from audio flaws, but Simon & Garfunkel's *oeuvre* has never sounded more beautiful. The sharp Kinks get some edges sanded off on the recent Castle editions, while the monolithically grungy stoner rock of Black Sabbath actually gains from going through the wash cycle.

Even though keeping up with the latest CD edition can be hard on the

wallet, still, what fans have ever really complained about their favorite artists sounding sterling? Indeed, the recently dusted-off collections of Creedence Clearwater Revival, Roxy Music, Steely Dan, the Beach Boys, the Band, the Ramones, the Velvet Underground and the Clash made listening to those bands on disc almost as exciting as hearing them for the first time. (The Velvets, Steely Dan and Clash collections were even reasonably priced.) Not to be outdone, relative cult acts like Liliput and Dream Syndicate got the red-carpet treatment, much to the pleasure of indie boosters of a certain age.

But in many cases, reissues purport to offer more than just better fidelity. Sometimes a re-released program can make you reassess an act entirely. In recent years, some labels and artists have demonstrated that when the time comes to cash in (again), they know how to provide more bang for the buck. The key? Context.

The motto of Columbia/Legacy, a division of Sony, is "not just reissued ... reimagined," but in reality most of the label's releases fall somewhere in the middle.

One massive exception remains the lauded Miles Davis program, which has repackaged the trumpeter's career into chronologically arranged boxed sets full of great essays and plenty of alternate takes. While the sets dedicated to Davis' great quintets or Gil Evans work obviously earned a great deal of praise, the more recent sets collecting his proto-fusion material—*The Complete Bitches Brew Sessions* and *The Complete In A Silent Way Sessions*—have garnered the most interesting reactions. Where once

Kind of Blue was the one Davis album that really possessed iconic status, now the radical experimentation of *Bitches Brew* is nipping right at its heels. Really, who would have guessed just 10 years ago that the album's trippy cover would be enlisted as a national liquor ad?

The venerable Rhino records, long the leader in reissues, is attempting a similar recasting of Elvis Costello, who already

Record labels stay flush by double- and even triple-dipping into the vaults for reissues—for better and for worse.

got the reissue treatment once before courtesy of Rykodisc. But now that his material has bounced to a different label, Rhino is trying a different approach. The label is packaging Costello's career into stylistic waves, each intended to highlight a different aspect of the artist's career. The first wave featured Elvis in singer-songwriter mode; the current wave, of his earlier material, features Elvis the rocker. On their way are Elvis the artist, Elvis the genre-miner, and so on. All the reissues include bonus discs of supplementary material from each era, thus brilliantly selling to both newcomers and old fans alike.

The Universal label group, thanks to rampant consolidation, includes the rich and vast catalogs of several great artists, and is taking a similar cue by rolling out smartly packaged double-disc editions of everything from Lynyrd Skynyrd to Marvin Gaye. Most fascinating of all may be Bob Marley's *Catch a Fire*. Considered reggae's breakthrough album, it has actually existed for decades full of overdubs added at the behest of Island Records founder Chris Blackwell. These embellishments have generally gone unnoticed, since there was no "before" to compare to the "after." But the new *Catch a Fire* includes the Jamaican version of the album capturing a rawer Marley. Would the Jamaican disc have made Marley a star? It's doubtful, but years of exposure to the second version has certainly

compromised the experiment. But there's no doubting the value of at last having the original on hand.

Lastly, *Screamin' and Hollerin' the Blues*, a comprehensive collection of the unclassifiable proto-blues-folk artist Charley Patton put together by Revenant records, is an ironically excessive exploration into one of popular music's most vital yet invisible antecedents. The set comes housed like a vintage 78 record set, with each of seven discs (capturing the scratchy imperfections of Patton's primitive recordings in perfect digital clarity) housed in its own mock vinyl sleeve. The big green box includes several essays, impressive artwork and a copy of the late John Fahey's book on Patton.

Frankly, the artwork and packaging risks overshadowing the music rather than accenting it, unlike the more successful and simpler re-release of Harry Smith's *Anthology of American Folk Music*.

What's quite remarkable about the Patton set, however, is that the attractive packaging, comprehensive contents and even the hefty price tag itself—a startling \$170—have managed to make an oft-fetishized and somewhat obscure folk artist the object of popular attention.

That's the ultimate recasting by way of reissue: transforming an artist, of whom only one photo exists, into a mysterious hipster icon. Still, the effect is undeniably appealing: a history lesson, work of art and record collection rolled into one. The box just oozes context.

A reissue that can make music like Patton's sound fresh and new, or reveal a new facet of an artist as overexposed as Marley, has got to be doing something right. In many ways, music history is written by the listeners, and by giving the listeners something new to wrap their ears around, these reissues are adding new chapters to the ongoing story of pop music. ■

Unreliable Narrators

By Richard Porton

Replying to critics who damned *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as "immoral," Oscar Wilde maintained that his supposedly decadent novel was in fact "too moral." Todd

Storytelling

Written and directed by Todd Solondz

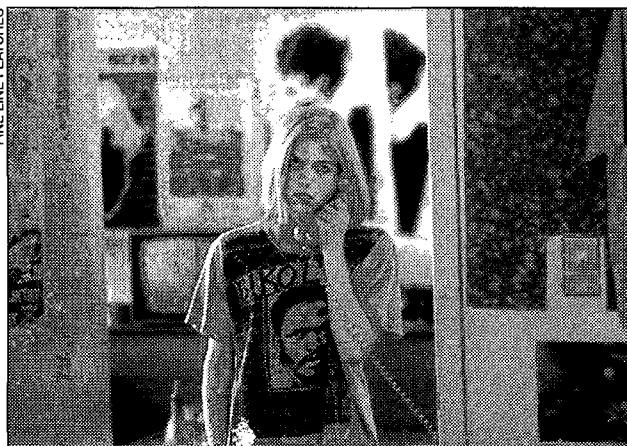
Solondz finds himself in a similar quandary. Despite making films that have been condemned as "nihilistic"

and "amoral," he is, in many respects, an unrepentant, albeit misunderstood, moralist. In any case, after skewering suburbia in *Welcome to the Dollhouse* and insisting in *Happiness* that pedophilia can be more banal than evil, it's become clear that he possesses an unerring talent for making critics and audiences both squeamish and irate.

His latest film, *Storytelling* (The New York Observer's Andrew Sarris concluded his review by proclaiming, "I hate it.

I hate it. I hate it."), again raises the questions that continue to polarize viewers: Is Solondz a fearless satirist whose attacks on good taste constitute a needed breath of fresh air? Or is he an inveterate misanthrope who sneers at his caricatured protagonists with a marked lack of empathy? *Storytelling*, which is most intriguing for its merciless self-scrutiny, demonstrates

Selma Blair in *Storytelling*, trying hard not to be a racist.



that there is more than a certain amount of truth to both assertions.

A two-part variation on Solondz's usual themes of adolescent angst and suburban squalor, the film opens with an episode coyly titled "Fiction." Scorn is heaped on both the masochistic rituals of creative writing seminars and guilty white liberalism—and the cleverness of this assault on political correctness resides in our gradual realization that these disparate forms of self-delusion are in fact intertwined. The focus is on Vi (Selma Blair), a student at a college where the manicured lawns and antiseptic buildings are indistinguishable from the landscape of an industrial park.

The seeming blandness of Solondz's settings and characters enables him to up the ante as a provocateur. If there is something a little cruel about the fate he designs for the attractive and well-intentioned Vi, her creator proves ultimately more rueful than contemptuous. The hapless heroine feels like a good citizen when she dates a fellow student stricken with cerebral palsy, proudly dons a Steve Biko T-shirt in class, and admires the social realist novels written by Mr. Scott (Robert Wisdom), her dour African-American creative-writing instructor.

While it would be easy to dismiss this scenario as a conservative indictment of campus altruism, Vi is not being condemned for her left-liberal agenda but for her shallowness and hypocrisy—traits that implicitly extend to the critics who condemn films like *Storytelling* for their lack of "positive" characters.

Mr. Scott, certainly no paragon of virtue himself, cavalierly trashes an earnest but sentimental story by Vi's disabled paramour as a "piece of shit" and seduces his female students with impunity. But as Vi prepares for a tryst with Mr. Scott in his bathroom and peruses nude photos of other co-eds, she mutters under her breath, "Don't be racist, don't be racist." Her self-rebuke might be viewed as an admonition to the audience as they ponder a black protagonist who is neither a cardboard villain nor an idealized hero in the mold of the characters once played by Sidney Poitier.

What follows has become *Storytelling*'s most notorious scene—Mr. Scott exercises his power by having passionless anal sex with Vi and ordering her to abuse

him with racist epithets. Capitulating to the demands of the film's distributor, which imposed a contractual obligation on Solondz to deliver an "R" rating, the scene is digitally obscured by what he has termed a "Stalinist red box." Yet the bowdlerized sex scene allows us to envision a coupling that is undoubtedly much smuttier and graphic than what was included in the original cut.

Vi, rather predictably, bases her next writing exercise on this decidedly unerotic encounter with Mr. Scott. Equally unsurprising is the savaging she receives from her fellow students—accusations of misogyny, racism and affectation are vol-

Is Todd Solondz a "nihilist" or just a misunderstood moralist?

unteered with the hollow proviso that it's all a matter of opinion. Vi's protest that "it happened" inspires her unflappable instructor to utter what might be Solondz's credo—"once you start writing it all becomes fiction."

In a similar vein, the film's longer, more ambitious segment, "Nonfiction," takes as its departure point the premise that documentary can be as slippery and opaque as fiction. Toby (Paul Giamatti), an aspiring filmmaker whose pale visage and enormous glasses makes him Solondz's unflattering alter ego, clings to his dream of achieving fame and fortune with a documentary on the pressures experienced by college-bound suburban high school students. (While Solondz comes off in interviews as one tough—and articulate—nerd, Toby is merely a talentless wimp.)

The self-regard of documentarians who simultaneously "love" their subjects and cash in on their foibles certainly offers rich material for satire. (As far back as 1979, Albert Brooks' *Real Life* offered a gentler, although in certain respects more devastating, look at the same milieu.) Unfortunately, while the impact of "Fiction" is comparable to a concise blackout sketch, "Nonfiction" misfires by tackling a much larger canvas with a similarly minimalist approach that proves more sterile than enlighten-

ing. The more diffuse focus of the second half almost confirms the accusations lobbed by Solondz's most severe critics—the characters are buffoons that make us feel perilously smug.

This tendency becomes especially glaring with the arrival on the scene of Scooby (Mark Webber), the vapid teenage "star" of Toby's movie. An affectless young man whose only ambition is to become famous like his television idols, Conan O'Brien and David Letterman, he merely appears to prove the tautological proposition that an intellectually impoverished environment, besotted with pop culture, produces apolitical, numbed kids.

Scooby's unsavory family, moreover, provides many strained opportunities for glib humor. His blowhard father (played by the always convincing John Goodman) comes off as a more prosperous version of Ralph Kramden. His mother (Julie Hagerty), obsessed with Israel's survival but oblivious to her Hispanic maid's privations, is little more than a ninny. The plight of the maid, Consuelo (Lupe Ontiveros), could easily be mined for more than a few cheap shots. In the final analysis, however, she is, like her employers, another expendable gargoyle.

These shenanigans are enlivened with occasional barbed humor. Solondz has great fun mocking the hand-held camera work and artistic pretensions of the largely clueless Toby. The mock-documentary's futile attempt at lyricism allows him to wreak revenge on director Sam Mendes (who told an interviewer of his disgust after seeing *Happiness*) and insert an enjoyably gratuitous put-down of his *American Beauty*. A school psychologist's claim that the "youth of Bosnia" experienced "less stress" during the siege of Sarajevo "than what American high school students go through when applying to college" captures our culture of narcissism with deadpan accuracy. Nevertheless, as *Storytelling* lurches towards a preordained bleak conclusion, it seems less like an astringent critique of American conformism than a filmmaker's attempt to round up the usual boorish suspects. ■

Richard Porton is a member of Cineaste's editorial board and the author of *Film and the Anarchist Imagination*.

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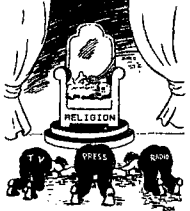


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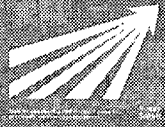


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By Nicole Hollander

CONTINUED FROM BACK PAGE

for participating in these projects, many of which fall into the gray areas of the law. ... [Some] of these projects receive cease-and-desist letters and legal attacks.

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Voteauction.com

One of your projects caused quite a stir during the U.S. presidential elections last year. Voteauction.com, a site created by James Baumgartner, was described as a project "devoted to combining the American principles of democracy and capitalism by bringing the big money of campaigns directly to the voting public. We provide a forum for campaign contributors and voters to come together for free-market exchange."

The site used parody to point out that elections are influenced by the amount of money poured into the process by large corporations. Voteauction.com was closed by Network Solutions without any kind of notice after the Chicago Board of Elections filed an election fraud lawsuit against the domain. The New York State

Board of Elections also told Baumgartner that they could press charges against him.

Having received this threat, Baumgartner closed his site, selling it to Hans Bernhard, an Austrian businessman who took the site outside of U.S. jurisdiction. What was your involvement in this project?

We helped with the Voteauction launch by putting James in touch with a worker (a publicist who could help him get the word out), and by procuring a small investment to help him pay for some of his hosting costs and phone bills. ... Later on, when James was under attack, we helped negotiate the sale of the site to ubermorgen.com in Austria.

To what extent was this intended to be a parody? It seems like some well-meaning people took it at face value, as a genuine subversion of the electoral process.

Many famous satires have been taken seriously by some of the public. Even things like Swift's "A Modest Proposal," despite being completely unbelievable, made people genuinely angry about eating babies. ... But perhaps the lesson here is that even something as outrageous as suggesting babies as food isn't that outrageous, given the past relationship between the English government and the Irish, and the circumstances of the potato famine. And in the case of Voteauction, it really isn't that outrageous for a company to be selling votes, given the way that elections work in this country today.

Was the project a success?

It was extremely successful because it was seen by millions of people and became a subject of public debate around the world. I think in many of

those news stories it successfully demonstrated just how corrupt our so-called democracy has become.

YES MEN AT WTO

The Yes Men at WTO is another fine example of creating confusion and certainly one of ®™ark's funniest projects. It is summarized on the ®™ark site: "In early 2000, ®™ark transferred Gatt.org—which people sometimes mistake for the World Trade Organization's official Web site—to a group of impostors known as the Yes Men. ... In May 2000, the Yes Men received an e-mail inviting Mike Moore, Director-General of the WTO, to discuss the WTO at a conference on international trade matters [hosted by the Center for International Legal Studies in Salzburg, Austria]. The Yes Men decided to do the ethical thing ... and to try their best to fulfill the request. In late October, one Dr. Andreas Bichlbauer—the substitute "Moore" decided to send—spoke at the conference. His lecture described the WTO's ideas and ultimate aims in terms that were horrifyingly stark—suggesting, for example, the replacement of inefficient democratic institutions like elections with private-sector solutions like an Internet startup selling votes to the highest corporate bidder. None of the lawyers in attendance expressed dismay at Dr. Bichlbauer's proposals."

The only people who seemed to react to Bichlbauer's outlandish remarks were some Italian delegates who were offended by his statement concerning the impossibility of a merger between KLM and Alitalia due to the basic laziness of the Italian worker.

Posted on the ®™ark site is a hysterically comical series of letters and e-mail correspondence between Dr. Bichlbauer, Professor Campbell (the conference organizer), "Mike Moore" and his administrative assistant, Alice Foley. Through the series of letters, memos and e-mails, we see the farce unfold.

The whole thing really goes over the top when the Yes Men prolong the hoax by announcing that their representative has been "pied," contracting a grave illness from a bacterial infection. (Was the pie intentionally poisoned? Possibly by an offended Italian delegate?) Dr. Bichlbauer is promptly disposed of and a memorial service

"®™ark's primary goal is to publicize corporate subversion of the democratic process. To this end, it acts as a clearinghouse for anti-corporate projects."

announced. The hoax is revealed as messages expressing both sadness and confusion pour in. Finally, a conversation takes place concerning the point of the exercise.

So what was the point?

The Yes Men use affirmation to make their point. It is an unusual rhetorical strategy, almost a reverse-psychology approach. Instead of debating their opponents, they assume their opponents' identities and enthusiastically affirm their adversaries' beliefs. It's an unorthodox approach, but hardly new or original. In fact, I think something like Swift's "Modest Proposal" also falls into this category, in a sense.

The point of this Salzburg action was to enhance the legibility of the WTO's policies. To that end, the Yes Men gave a kind of uncensored version of the WTO's positions. ... There was an audience of legal experts who basically did not object to Andreas Bichlbauer (real name: Andy Bichlbaum) explaining that the WTO believed in doing away with all cultural differences (for example, siestas) that get in the way of free trade.

Since the expert audience agreed that Voteauction.com was a model for making elections more efficient and opening new markets, it appears that the Yes Men failed to cause any revelations at the event. However, clearly this should be a wake-up call to all of us who care about our votes ... or any kind of representative government reflecting social interests.

So why did Bichlbauer's offensive remarks not cause a stir?

I think it reveals that belief in late capitalism runs so deep that even an audience of specialists in trade and law refuse to see a fundamentally antisocial, if not fascist, message in the text. When that happens, people can only be blind to their complicity in an oppressive system.

EXONERATION

Although you claim to use pedagogical means, it seems that creating confusion is one of your preferred tactics, and this is one of the recurrent criticisms made of your methods. Don't you think that this

"We believe that all methods must be pursued in the interest of change. Certainly those who are taking a more direct approach are doing the most important job. ... We happen to be better at something else."

might just result in preaching to the converted and antagonizing the other side, further polarizing the debate?

®™ark is one of only a few organizations who try to support these bizarre projects, so I think that is why we become known for confusion. ... Try to find a "legitimate" funding organization interested in the value of confusing people, and I think the list will be pretty small. And yet, if we sample history, I think we will see that confusion is a very important aspect of human communication, one that is as useful and prevalent as a more didactic approach.

We believe that all methods must be pursued in the interest of change. Certainly, those who are taking a more direct approach are doing the most important job for creating change. But there are people out there doing those things, and we happen to be better at something else. We believe that confusion is a very valuable state.

You attack corporations and large international organizations, yet you get reviewed in *Artforum*. Are you artists, activists, anarchists or a little of all three? Do you care how people perceive you?

All of the above. Most importantly, we are people. We see all media outlets as potential sites for communication and dia-

logue to a wider audience. ... If we end up in art mags, so be it. We also like to be able to express ourselves in business publications, sports rags, etc. We do care about how people perceive us; we hope that through ongoing outreach we can contribute to the growing movement against unfettered global capitalism. ■

Sylvie Myerson is the editor of *Sandbox Magazine* (www.sandboxarts.org), a non-profit arts magazine whose forthcoming issue is titled "Incarceration & Surveillance." She can be reached at sandbox@echonyc.com.

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Art of Confusion

An Interview with ®™ark's Frank Guerrero

Anti-corporate saboteurs ®™ark have been causing trouble since 1993, when they started off as an Internet bulletin board. They have grown and developed to such an extent that they are now at the forefront of "culture jamming"—subverting the language of corporate and advertising culture to point out what is brewing beneath the surface. ®™ark operates somewhere in the gray area between activism and performance art, or what Hakim Bey once referred to as "poetic terrorism."

In These Times spoke with Frank Guerrero via e-mail to discuss what ®™ark had been up to, specifically the Voteauction.com project ("The only election platform channelling 'soft money' to the democracy consumer") and the "Yes Men" project. The first part of this interview, in which Guerrero discusses the group's mission and tactics, is condensed from an interview conducted for *Sandbox Magazine* #7: *Art vs. State*.

— SYLVIE MYERSON

®™ark promotional material / www.rtmrk.com



ORIGINS OF ®™ARK

From looking at your Web site (www.rtmrk.com), it seems there's a certain amount of ambiguity about whether a specific project should be taken as a joke or a really serious act of sabotage.

A lot of the projects do use humor as a means for slipping under the radar of social acceptability. Now just because a lot of the projects are funny doesn't mean that ®™ark's mission isn't serious. It is a serious system that means, through a combination of real actions and theater, to criticize and hopefully undermine the role that corporations are taking in supplanting democratic or social processes of governments. This is our main reason for being.

We feel very strongly that corporations have been slowly but surely supplanting and subverting the processes of government that were put into place so that the people could have some sort of say in their political and social destiny. It seems like this is an impor-

tant moment in globalization—with all these international borders coming down—at least for capital, though not necessarily for people. We see it as a real problem that's boiling over.

So ®™ark is a way to attack that system from within using primarily theatrical and pedagogical means. We're there to destabilize the system in such a way that people might get a little entertainment and at the same time have those projects ask a few questions of them.

How did you develop from your original structure as a bulletin board?

When the bulletin board went up in 1993, it was a networking tool that worked mostly through word of mouth. But ®™ark changed and is now coming into its own by using the Web as an open-ended networking and databasing tool.

We have a database that lists basically three things: the project idea, a funding amount and, lastly, workers. So you can come to the site and read

through the list of ideas. If you see one that you like, you can offer to sponsor the project with some money or you could offer to perform the project. If it's an idea, let's say, to change a gas tank in a production automobile so that the gas tank can only hold two gallons of gas instead of 20, and you happen to be working on a production line where they're installing gas tanks, you might volunteer your services.

It's an open-ended system, and you can come to it with money, or you can come to it as a worker with an idea looking for money. ... That's probably the most common thing. ... People submit ideas they want to carry out themselves but need to raise some capital to do it.

So ®™ark is a facilitator?

Yes, ®™ark is a facilitator, and ®™ark's primary reason for existing is to use the corporate veil as a way to permit people to offset their liability

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